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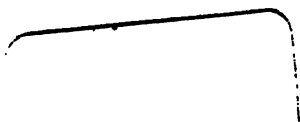
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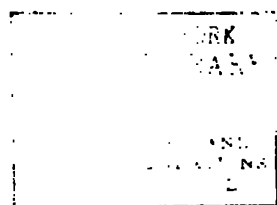
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GIRLS OF A FEATHER.







THE TWO GIRLS IN THEIR COOL GARMENTS WERE REALLY A PRETTY PICTURE.—See *Chapter III.*

REPORT OF A READER

1892

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GIRLS OF A FEATHER

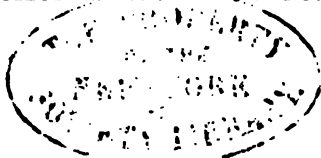
A Novel.

BY

MRS. AMELIA E. BARR,

*Author of "The Beads of Tasmer," "The Mate of the 'Easter
Bell,'" "Friend Olivia," "The Household of
McNeil," "A Sister to Esau," etc.*

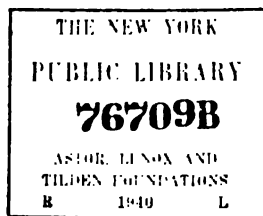
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NEW YORK:

ROBERT BONNER'S SONS,

1893.



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GIRLS OF A FEATHER.

CHAPTER I.

"CAN YOU DOUBT IT?"

"But men await the tale of love,
And weary of the tale of Troy."

NONE of the events of life seem to have such a pronounced fatality as those which refer to love and to death. Who among us has the oracle of his grave? Who can tell under what skies it will be dug; or at what time? And the uncertainty of dying is not greater than that of loving. A man may walk daily among the fairest women on earth and never know the meaning of the word. He may come to an age which fairly gives him warrant to assure himself that he is proof against the witcheries of women. He may even deplore his insensibility to them; and yet find that the bitterly-sweet experience has only been a little delayed—that in an hour undreamed-of—without premonition or prepara-

tion, he falls serenely and carelessly into the deepest depths of that half-divine condition.

Perhaps no man in New York felt more certain of his position in this respect than Dr. Robert Carter, a physician of renown, a man of great wealth, very handsome, and still unmarried though nearly forty years old. He was accustomed to speculate on the circumstance; and specially so when the claims of his profession took him to Adrian Van Buren's. He had been there one afternoon, and as his carriage joined the stream of vehicles coming down the Avenue, he soon became thoughtful, and the enforced slowness of his progress conduced to reflection:

"What a noble woman she is! How strong, how gentle and how wonderfully handsome! Only, I do not *feel* her beauty. My heart beats no faster in her presence. I can forget her for weeks together. Yet I wish I could love her. I like her father; she has no embarrassing female relatives; and I ought to marry. Will is always telling me so; and Will is right. But I know that there is such a thing as love. Professionally, I have met cases of 'love unto death.' Surely in the presence of Alida Van Buren—a woman who is even physically divine—I ought to feel love—but I do not!"

Engrossed with such thoughts, he had nearly reached his home, when he remembered that he had promised to call upon a sick gentleman living in a neighboring street. He knew him to be a reckless speculator, and he had a very shrewd idea as to his physical trouble.

"I will wager my fee that he is dying of gold on the brain," he muttered as he went to the chamber of his patient. And he told him so plainly.

"What have you to do with the money-market, Mr. Shepherd?" he asked. "You, whose nervous system is all on the outside, and whose feelings are refined by prolonged culture. To men of your caliber, the money-market is only a common form of suicide."

"What is the world but a money-market, doctor?"

"It is a great deal more. Men who make colossal fortunes do not do so so much from choice as because it is their *raison d'être*. When Nature produces a creature for the special purpose of making money, she does not burden him with nerves and with wants and desires that would scatter his forces."

"Money-makers are necessary to progress, doctor."

"Certainly they are. This is the industrial age, and there must be men who are great reservoirs of capital. How else could we build railroads and lay ocean cables! But consider the men who make great sums of money, and you will see that in all business matters they act with the steadiness and the certainty of *instincts*. Culture impairs natural instincts, makes them hesitating and considerate. You are too cultured, Mr. Shepherd; you will never succeed in making millions; and I tell you, if you continue the effort, you will kill yourself. Go to the seaside—to the woods—to the mountains—go anywhere but to the money-market."

The sick man sighed and turned his head wearily to the wall. And Doctor Carter having done his duty, went slowly down-stairs. He was buttoning his gloves and thinking of his dinner. As he passed through the hall, he was arrested by the opening of a door. A small, slight figure; a woman's face, young and lovely; a soft, eager voice—made potential reason for his delay.

"Doctor Carter, how is my father? Is he very ill?"

The white, anxious face lifted to his face was very beautiful, but that was not the charm. It was *the face* for which he had been waiting; it was *the voice*, which seemed to have half-forgotten echoes in his memory. No other woman had ever touched him in just the same way. He felt a right in her, and a determination to compass that right the moment she spoke to him. An unusual tenderness came into his heart, and the sick man acquired a sudden interest through the sick man's daughter. He sat down by her side and entered into explanations and directions not before thought necessary. He could have remained with her all day. Her eyes drew him like magnets; and when she gave him her hand at parting he hardly knew how to escape from its clasp. When all had been said, he still held it; and for a moment they looked silently at each other. In that moment her face was imprinted upon his heart. He knew that he must evermore carry the sweet impression.

Robert Carter was nearing forty years old, and accustomed to diagnosticate both mental and physical symptoms. He knew what had happened to him.

"I have fallen in love at last," he mused. "I was taken so absolutely unawares. However, in real life," he said decidedly to himself, "love is the most manageable passion in the world."

Then he wondered if he should tell his brother. He would, and then he would not; and yet he knew his indecision was all a pretense of indifference. In his heart he was longing to describe the loveliness and sorrow which had subjugated him.

There was indeed between Robert and Will Carter

a brotherly affection which could not endure reservations, although no two men could have been more dissimilar in many respects. Robert lacked all sentiment and poetic tastes and was without spiritual discernments. No obstinate questions of "Why?" or "Where?" ever troubled him, and no mere matter of feeling was ever likely to interfere with his "getting on" in the world. Will Carter cared very little for the world, but much for the unfathomable inner side of life. He was a lover of nature, a fine musician, a man who inhabited only his head and his heart and who put all fleshly desires under his feet.

Yet, in spite of these radical oppositions in taste and in character, the brothers had a strong attachment for each other. Accustomed to give all affairs of their lives a mutual confidence and discussion, they derived from the habit something of that moral discipline which a priest derives from "manifesting his conscience." And though Robert's many duties separated them from morning to night, as soon as they were together again Will usually opened the conversation by asking :

"What has happened to you to-day, Robert?"

The answers to this question had a certain monotony and yet a constant variety. Will saw the world through them. He had almost a child's curiosity in their recurrence, for was there not always the possibility of something wonderful to tell? He seldom admitted that this wonderful element must be love, yet the thought and dream were always present. He had little unspoken disappointments in his brother's indifference to women ; for though his modest self-depreciation forbade any personal hope

of marriage, he continually imagined for Robert some exquisite girl-wife, who would be good, pure and lovely as the angels in heaven.

It grieved him when Robert smiled away such hopes. It grieved him still more to hear women slightly spoken of. He never hesitated to rebuke such words and to remind his brother of the dead mother and sister whose memory still sweetened their pleasant home. But as year after year went by, he began to let the idea of Robert's marriage slip away a little. It grew fainter and fainter until the girl-wife, whom he had almost seen going through the house, filling it with love and sunshine, became a pale shadow of his first hope. He had even ceased to speak much to Robert on the subject.

"We shall both wither away in the rooms our father built, and there will be none to come after us," he thought.

For it seems a part of fruition that hope must first have been abandoned. Destiny loves surprises. Will was not that night even watching for his brother. He was holding "large discourse" at the organ, in those abrupt shocks of startling melody which prelude the "Messiah" and arrest and inspire the mind with majestic contemplation. Will was quite under their spell. He did not hear his brother enter the room, and he did not see him standing at the window, looking first at his own iridescent fingernails and then at the moving picture trampling down the avenue.

Nor did Robert interrupt his brother. He had some sweet thoughts for entertainment, and it was near six o'clock. In a few minutes, he knew, the butler would have no hesitation in saying, no mat-

ter what immortal melody was ringing through the room: "Mr. Will, the dinner is served, sir." And even as he remembered this certain interruption it was accomplished; and Will, with the look of a man suddenly awakened from sleep, came down from the clouds to the dining-room.

He went to his brother's side with something of the affectionate confidence of a child, and as soon as they were alone he asked his usual question:

"What has happened to you to-day, Robert?"

"I have made calls and delivered my lecture. And you? What have you been doing, Will?"

"I have read and written and walked. But it is hard to walk in the city now. I want to go to the woods. I want solitude. I want it a hundred miles thick on every side. I saw a starling shoot through the square, swift, straight and resolute. I knew he was going to the country. I made a rendezvous with him there."

"To-day I also made a rendezvous in the country. But it was with a young lady."

"Robert! You made a rendezvous with a young lady! Who is she? What is her name? Where is her habitation?"

"She is Mr. Ambrose Shepherd's daughter. I do not know her personal name yet. She lives in the next street. Ambrose Shepherd is very ill. I have advised his removal into the country, and his daughter asked me if I would visit her father there. I said I would."

"But then? That is not all!"

"Not quite."

"For you never go out of town to see patients. Robert, I *am* amazed! I have no proper words to

express my amazement. I can only use the inarticulate formula in 'Little Dorrit : ' *'It du ! It really du !! It du, indeed !! !'* Is Miss Shepherd pretty?"

"She has a captivating face and manner. I am afraid, Will, she has almost persuaded me to fall in love with her."

"Robert ! Do fall in love with her ! I hope you cannot help falling in love ! 'I du ! I really du ! I du, indeed !' "

"Sensible people can always help folly, Will. Do you suppose I shall allow myself to fall in love on unknown ground ? And if I do fall in love, I need not therefore marry."

"You are talking uncommon nonsense, Robert. If Miss Shepherd should take it into her head to marry you ? Then where would you be ?"

"Just where I am, I suppose."

"Oh, no, indeed ! In such a case you would be as certain to marry Miss Shepherd as you would be to arrive at Washington if you got into a train going to Washington. And just think, Robert, how charming it would be to have a lovely woman going about these rooms ! How charming to hear her calling your name ! To see her, exquisitely dressed, sitting at your side at this very table ! What excellent dinners we should have ! And how perfectly the house would then be ordered ! For one of the miracles about women—even young girls—is that they make the most outrageous servants behave themselves and do their duty. You know that both of us are afraid of the servants. Yes, we are, Robert. Do fall in love, then ! It would be such happiness for both of us !"

"Tell me, Will, why should a man sacrifice every

other consideration to one single condition of happiness? And it is by no means sure that domestic life is the highest form of human bliss and aspiration."

"As far as women are concerned, perhaps not. The woman of to-day is such a miracle. If John Milton wrote now, he would be compelled to make man, and not woman, 'the defect of nature.' Women are so much in advance of us now. What degrees they take! What books they write! How eloquent they are for the best side of everything!"

"If Miss Shepherd is one of these miracles, I shall not go to the country to see her. I greatly disapprove of women who lecture and write books. I could not love a woman who always met me at intellectual sword-point. I like a girl to have the bloom of womanhood upon her."

"Does the girl who writes a book lose any more 'bloom' than the girl who reads what is written? The highest education for women—"

"Is the education that best fits them for married life. Marriage is a woman's highest destiny."

"Very good, Robert. The men ought to hold a similar doctrine of predestination about their own destiny: Man's highest education is that which best fits him for married life. The one theory supposes the other."

"Will, why do you not fall in love? You seem to have progressive ideas on the subject."

"I have been very near it often. I would dare the experience gladly if I could find a suitable companion to dare it with me. I am not handsome. I am very different to you, Robert."

"You are rich."

"Love is not bought in the market-place."

"*Oh! Oh! Oh!* That is just where you are wrong, Will."

"A wedding-ring may be bought; but love? No! Love has no earthly equivalent. May God send those together who would fain be loved!"

With these words he rose from the table and began to light his cigar; but he accompanied his movement to a murmur of songs, which had such a swing of march and melody that Robert felt it impossible to resist the curious interest with which it inspired him.

"What are you singing, Will?" he asked. "It sounds like some incantation. Whatever are you doing with your syllables?"

"I am singing four lines from the 'Eve of Venus.' I wonder if it is near her advent? Listen, Robert, to the commands of the great goddess:

" 'Lovers become; and begin to-morrow,
You that have not ever loved before.
Aye, and to-morrow again be lovers,
You that have loved and love no more.' "

The music was sharp and poignant to the very last note, and when it had rung itself out, Robert also rose. He went to the window and flung it open. The words and melody affected him strangely. They were fastened in his memory like a nail in a sure place. He wished to change the subject entirely, and he asked his brother:

"When do you go to the country, Will?"

"In a day or two. It is very warm and the city is already empty."

"Perhaps; but the country is still emptier."

"You do not like the country, Robert?"

"No! I do not like the country, and life is too

short to spend any part of it in a place that is disagreeable to you. I like the city. I like the greetings in the market-place and the jargon of the clubs and the gossip in the wide office of the Fifth Avenue Hotel. I like the questing and the guessing and the eager, angry, imperious struggles of life."

"And so you wear your heart and nerves and brain away."

"Precisely—but I live. Did you hear that Calvert has fled with a lot of money?"

"What folly to steal when it is so much more lucrative to cheat."

"But when a man lends himself half a million at once?"

"He is a poor fellow. Suppose you advise Ambrose Shepherd to go to Stromberg. I am going there, and I could look after him a little. I should like to know his daughter."

"Stromberg is as good a place as any other. He simply wants to get beyond the jingle of gold and the financial slang of the Street. But that is the difficulty."

"There ought to be a Lotus-land for our worn-out financiers, Robert. A land in which it should be always afternoon, without any afternoon newspaper."

"What nonsense! How could you make mild-eyed, melancholy lotus-eaters out of New York stock-jobbers? If you took them to a veritable land of Tennyson, they would scramble up those 'three silent pinnacles of snow'; they would measure the height of each peak and build a hut at the limits of the snow-line. Very soon they would organize a joint-stock hotel company, put up a monster building and incite the lazy inhabitants to become guides and

keepers of livery-stables. And there would be a morning paper, of course, full of financial schemes and real-estate booms. In short, Lotus-land would soon become a miniature New York."

"Lovers of nature—"

"I tell you, Will, lovers of nature are born so. They are a ready-made article. I am always bored to death in the country."

"How can a man be bored anywhere, with all the resources of our high civilization?"

"I assure you, Will, that a capacity for being bored is a proof of our high civilization. The degree in which you feel *ennui* is the actual measure of your active power running to waste. A country boor full of beer and bacon is not bored. He is happy enough if he may sit still and convert beer and bacon into flesh and blood."

They pursued this conversation, until Will arrived at the millennium. Robert threw no impediments in his way there. He found apparent listening a good opportunity for giving his thoughts their free will; and he regarded the fact with some interest, that they had instantly flown to the girl he had seen for the first time that afternoon. He did not analyze her beauty; he preferred to realize it in its entirety. To consider her features, her form, her air, her voice, separately, was like pulling a rose to pieces, to count its petals or to find out to what botanical family it belonged. All in all, the maiden was sweet and lovely; and Robert Carter, as he sat in the gloaming, half listening to his brother's theories and quite absorbed in love's delicious dreaming, was inclined to let his heart lead him.

But even philosophical philanthropists get tired



eventually of their eloquence ; and when Will Carter had traced the growth of brotherly love until it brought forth the millennium, he said :

"I may as well stop, Robert. I do not think you are as interested in the millennium as you ought to be."

"It was a kind of Northwest passage there, Will. And, after all, the millennium is so far away, while the probabilities of our ever reaching it seem to grow less and less every year. However, nothing prevents our going to sleep and dreaming it is here."

But such was not the dream Robert Carter bespoke ; for as he went loitering and thoughtfully about the room, preparing himself for rest, he was softly humming the invocation of a far older lover :

"Come, Sleep ! But, mind you, if you come without
The little girl that I would dream about,
By Jove ! I would not give you half a crown
For all your poppy-heads and all your down !"

And when the great mystery of sleep wrappeth a man like a garment, how shall he order what is to befall him in that condition ? For though Robert entered it full of pleasant hopes and plans, he awoke weary and sad, with a heart aching with a nameless apprehension. He spoke to his brother jestingly of the matter.

"It was the *pâté*, Will. There could have been no other reason. I was thinking of Miss Shepherd all the evening. What fools we mortals be, sleeping or waking."

"We may be fools, waking, Robert ; but in sleep, we get very close to the truth about ourselves. One-fourth of our time is spent in sleeping and dreaming ; is it likely, then, that the whole matter is of no

consequence? Besides, our dreams are as individual as our thoughts."

"You could not prove such an assertion as that, Will."

"Oh, but I can! You told me last week one of your horrible dreams after vivisection; and at the very same hour I was dreaming of wandering in a great wood and listening to the green finches, who were laughing and talking back to each other. We are such stuff as our dreams are made of, Robert."

"All right. I see Horace Key is going to Congress. At least the *Herald* says so."

"And truth is absolute in the pages of the *Herald*. Why should Horace go to Congress? Such a gay-hearted fellow!"

"Congress is generally considered a good thing."

"But it is not a cheerful thing. Multitudes of people go to sleep there."

"All business is, I suppose, rather dull."

"I think so. If I call on Fred Lenox, I feel the weight of his office on my heart for days afterward—the files of big books, the desks of awful height, the bills and papers, the silent men writing, writing, writing—are a kind of nightmare."

"And yet, what thought, decision and action are recorded in those dull books! Every line is the work of a considering brain and a patient hand. If one could read between the figures, what romances there are in those dull books! What records of adventure and hard labor!"

"You speak as if work was a man's highest condition."

"Is it not?"

"No. If you had listened to my theory of the

millennium, you would understand that the great point of the labor question will be solved in it; that is, men and women will have time to work for their souls as well as their bodies. Work, for the sake of gold, is the superstition of an age infatuated with money. It kills every way. Look at Ambrose Shepherd! Are you going there this morning?"

"No."

The negative was sharp and final in sound, and Robert Carter thought it expressed his fixed determination. He was in that depressed condition which often precedes some great change, and whose dominant symptom is a dread of change. To hold fast to life just as it was, in every petty detail, appeared to him at that hour the chief part of wisdom.

But as the day went on and he began to take his part in its duty and struggle, the *other-worldness* was driven away, as the mist is driven away before the advancing sun. Then some pleasant thing happened, and he had the mental tonic necessary. About noon he called himself "coward" for running away from an obvious duty, because there was a woman in the way. So that he finally rang the Shepherds' door-bell in a state of virtuous control, which he believed to be invincible.

He saw no one in the hall but the servant who admitted him. An air of silence and loneliness pervaded the house. It had a certain effect on him, and he went softly upstairs. He knew his patient's room and he pushed aside the door. There was a decided and intentional gloom there, and at first he could see nothing. But in a few moments the interior was clear enough. Shepherd was in a deep sleep on his bed, and his daughter sat motionless at

his side. A closed book was in her hand, and her head was thrown back against the white-linen cover of the large chair in which she sat.

Robert looked steadily at the sleeping man, and then put out his hand to the girl. She took it, and he led her out of the room. They went silently down the stairs together. His feet moved with her feet, and every step sent him deeper and deeper into that abyss of delicious foolishness which is often the heart's highest wisdom. He had frequently held women's hands before, but never yet had any hand so wondrously thrilled his being, so soft, so warm, so natural in his own it seemed. Holding it, he found a link which hitherto he had not missed but which now he could never endure to lose again—a link that was a magical conductor of sweet, vague tremors and rosy hopes and delightful fears and darings.

They went into a parlor and sat down. He felt the silence awkward, but he had no mind to break it; and so far the sleeping patient had been excuse enough for its enthralling eloquence. Miss Shepherd took the initiative. She said shyly:

“I read father to sleep.”

“I see the book in your hand.”

She rose and laid it on the table.

“Father wanted the newspapers. I said they were not good for him. A novel always puts him to sleep.”

“Sleep is the best physician.”

“Mrs. Shepherd has gone to Stromberg to-day. We intend to rent a furnished house there.”

“At Stromberg? I am glad of that.”

“Father was born near Stromberg. When you

said he must go to the country, he would hear of no other place."

"It is the best of all places. Native air has a singular potency. I know a man who goes three thousand miles every year to breathe his native air. He believes it renews his life."

"You said you would come to the country to see my father. Is Stromberg too far away?"

"Not if *you* wish me to come."

"I *do* wish you to come."

"Then no distance is too far."

"Thank you. You are very kind."

"My brother Will is going to Stromberg also. He is the best of good fellows, and I am sure you will find him a pleasant friend."

"I am sure of it. But *you* will come also?"

"Can you doubt it?"

Her eyes were cast down; her cheeks aflame; her white hands lying upon her lap. A rose at her throat dropped its white petals upon them. He lifted the fragrant leaves and laid them in her palm, and as he did so his eyes said what words would have been a clumsy vehicle for—said in a moment more than he could have spoken in an hour.



CHAPTER II.

DID NOT ANSWER HIS CASE.

“O fair! O sweet!
As the sweet apple-blooms on the bough;
High on the highest; forgot of the gatherers;
So thou! So thou!
Yet not so, nor forgot of the gatherers;
High o’er their reach in the golden air,
O sweet! O fair!”

“Your father is much better this morning, Ambrosia?”

These were Mrs. Shepherd’s words as she entered the breakfast-room on the day following Doctor Carter’s second visit. And Ambrosia, having expressed her pleasure, the two women sat down to drink their coffee. The feeling between them was a happy and confidential one, though they were not mother and daughter, nor had the pretense of this relationship ever been assumed.

When Ambrosia was sixteen years old, Miss Clara Vaughn had come to the motherless girl as her teacher and companion; and when Ambrose Shepherd made her his wife, the romantic attachment

which Ambrosia had for her teacher was not unfavorably affected by the new position. Clara was now thirty years old, and Ambrosia was twenty. They were both beautiful. In other respects their unity arose from their differences. Clara was of Puritan lineage. She had been brought up in an atmosphere of severe economy, and taught from her childhood to keep her will and her desires under control. Her manner was therefore serene and full of womanly dignity; and though she was moved by her reason, her sense of duty and of justice, she was quite capable of great affection and of a supreme self-denial.

On the contrary, Ambrosia was moody and uncertain as an April day. She was also impulsive, unreasonable and a little tyrannical. Her father adored her, and she expected from him such continual blackmail as selfish youth considers the best evidence of love—trinkets, sweetmeats and plenty of pocket-money. In return, she firmly believed that she loved her father and her step-mother. She loved them as a girl loves those who give her pleasure and who, as yet, have demanded nothing from her in return. Whether she could have resigned for their sake her own will, her own happiness or her own interests was an undetermined question. Many characters are thought to be storm-proof which shrink at the first wetting.

For Ambrosia as yet looked at life from a sentimental point of view. She was at that mental stage which finds Moore and Byron interpreters of their soul-pangs; and so, theoretically, she believed all the world well lost for love. But there was also a practical side to the girl's nature, and, in the long run, it would possibly carry the day; for Ambrosia was

very fond of dress, and, in a social sense, she considered a fine toilet a girl's perfect salvation.

This morning, though the house was not clear from the depression and anxiety which sickness causes, she was wonderfully attired. It is extremely likely that Solomon in all his glory was not dressed with half the taste nor yet with such fine consideration as to color and style. And yet, her morning robe was the acme of simplicity. No mere man, with his dense perceptions as to "materials," would have believed that it cost more than the richest silk. She spread out the soft India mull and fingered the real Valenciennes and looked at Mrs. Shepherd for some token of her admiration. Clara was thinking of other things.

"I hope your father can be moved into the country at the end of the week," she said. "I must ask Doctor Carter about it."

"What do you think of Doctor Carter?"

"He appears to be a very respectable, clever man."

"Respectable!"

'Oh, good gracious!

How audacious!"

Why, Clara, Doctor Carter wears society's silver-slippers, and was born with a gold spoon in his mouth. Nora once lived with the Carters. I asked her about both brothers."

"You should not talk to the servants, Amber."

"I wanted to know. A girl has to take care of herself. The doctor was quite inclined to flirt. Nora says the brothers live in a house big enough for a hotel. Two young men! Neither of them married! It is a shame! Nora is a very nice girl. I gave her two dresses yesterday."

"Yet she will not go with us into the country, and I must look for new servants this morning. A weary search, for they are hard to find and bad when found."

"And some kinds quite extinct."

"Amber, if Doctor Carter calls this morning, I would not see him."

"But why, Clara? I have dressed myself specially to see him."

"Then, my dear, do not what you call flirt. It is so unwomanly and unladylike."

"Unwomanly? What a mistake! Flirting is the most womanly and ladylike of occupations. Really so. It is only people of culture that flirt."

"Now, Amber!"

"It is, Clara. A savage takes a cow and buys him a wife. Bridget, in the kitchen, and Fritz, the butcher's boy, look and love and tell each other the reason why, and then go and get married. But a girl in my position ought to know something of a man's temper and tastes before she marries him; and as she cannot ask him so many blunt questions, 'flirting' just means a little delicate diplomacy in this kind of investigation. Flirting ought not to mean anything worse than this."

"Still you cannot make me think a flirt a lovable character, Amber."

"I think she is a deal nicer than a prude. Any man of sense likes to be challenged to a combat in which a pretty woman may capture his heart—at least he likes it better than to be shunned and shrunk away from, as if he was always on the point of doing or saying something improper."

"All good men disapprove of 'flirting.'"

"No, they do not. I know lots of good men who have flirted through the alphabet. Some are bold, open flirts; some insinuating; some sentimental, like the curate of St. Azarius, who asked me last week, in a languishing way, if I believed in love-marriages, and did I really think it better to have loved and lost, etc., etc.? Now, how can a girl meet such men but with their own weapons? However, I do not think Doctor Carter is a 'flirt.' I think he fell honestly in love with me. Men even yet tumble into love at once, over head and heart. And when they do that kind of thing any sensible girl knows the fact and respects it."

"Love! Love! Love! Whence does it spring? Is it not wonderful, amid the shams and worries of our every-day life, what a constant charm and freshness the subject has? I cannot understand it."

"I do not think it makes any difference whether we understand it or not. Some things are nicer and sweeter for not being understood. I was reading yesterday that Robert Burns was once entreated by his publisher to make the language of his songs so that he could understand them. Burns answered that he did not care whether the publisher understood them or not, adding that he did not always understand them himself. That is the truth about love-making, Clara. Often we do not understand it ourselves, any more than Burns understood his own singing. And I like a feeling that has the largeness of mystery."

"You talk beyond me, Amber. I acknowledge myself vanquished. I suppose I must leave your affairs in your own hands." And she rose with the words and hurriedly left the room.



Ambrosia sat still. She was smiling to herself and crimping with neat little pinches the drooping lace around her sleeves. She had found out from Nora many things she did not think it necessary to tell her step-mother. And her imagination had been stimulated by the reported life of the two brothers. For Nora had gossiped with a grand indifference to facts, or rather to the perversion of them—Robert and Will Carter's lives being a constant source of wonder to their servants. For solitude is something the vulgar and illiterate never can understand; and a splendid solitude, not arranged for the world to see but as a simple adjunct to personal enjoyment, affected them as the lonely palaces of the "Arabian Nights" affect more cultured minds.

This morning Ambrosia greatly strengthened her influence over the handsome doctor, and she knew that when he reluctantly left her presence she held him by a power as invisible as the air and just as vital. He had remained with her until all excuses for delay were absurd, and, on leaving, he had proposed to return about five o'clock and drive her in the Park. He tried to say that her confinement to the sick-room had lowered the tone of her nerves, and that driving would be a physical tonic. Then meeting Ambrosia's clear, mirthful gaze, he quickly added:

"But, indeed, it is for my own delight I ask you. I am afraid I am altogether selfish. I hope you are not angry with me."

"When you deserve it I will be angry with you. I cannot tell the time when that will happen. But it will not be until I have forgotten what your skill has done for my father." And she made him a grace-

ful movement, keeping her eyes, bright and tender, fixed upon his face.

What can a man do under the fire of such glances? He is as powerless as were the waxen images of the enchanters before their magical fire. When a woman has a lover in this condition, if she only sing the right song to her charming, there is no pain that is not sweet and no trouble that is not rest for her sake.

And Robert Carter was not one of those lovers trained on the hard race-course of society. From such no one expects self-forgetfulness, devotion or the folly of loving for love's sake, any more than they expect flowers to grow on the street pavement. Robert Carter had still the capacity of loving with all his heart and soul. The constant society of his brother had kept him within touch of the divinity. He was flushing and blushing to his hopes and fears as naturally as if he were only twenty years old, when he bid Ambrosia "good morning," when he promised to call for her at five o'clock.

Instead of going to his next patient, he went to a florist's and bought the loveliest of his flowers, and sent them to Ambrosia. He went to Tiffany's and looked at some trinkets, hoping that at some time he would have the right to buy them for her. He went to his tailor's and ordered a new suit of clothes, and was so fastidious that the man felt himself to be already discussing the wedding garments. For the first time in all his professional career, the sufferings and complaints of his patients bored him.

Ambrosia had seemed pleased with his admiration, but he was not sure that she was in earnest, and until he had resolved this question all others appeared

tiresome and uninteresting. Yet he had only known her three days, and she seemed to have come into his heart long, long, long ago. He wondered most of all at this feeling, for he had not considered that real love is of the nature of God and therefore eternal. The heart always knows its own, and it always will know. Into its best affection there will come much of remembrance, a sense of familiarity, the tolerance for foibles which in some way or other seem to be kindred.

Robert hoped in some measure that night to satisfy his restless feelings. He intended, as they rode home in the twilight, to say to Ambrosia: "I love you. Can I teach you to love me?" He intended to tell her how bewitching she was. Above all, he wished to assure her that she had the first real homage of his heart.

He told her the last two things first; which was unwise. Ambrosia knew she was bewitching. Others had felt her charm, and in many ways had told her so. She had been two years in society, and flowers and evening drives were not strange pleasures to her. The passionate feeling which led Robert Carter to offer them was understood by Ambrosia, and not altogether trusted. Men did such things far oftener than they justified them by one or two simple questions.

And as for being his first love, the idea almost shook her confidence in him. All men said precisely the same thing. Jenny Fellowes—who had married a rich old admiral—had been asked to believe an exactly similar statement from the roving sailor. Jenny had told her so. It suddenly struck Ambrosia that the affair was maturing too rapidly.

Then she assumed a manner that was quite in opposition to the romantic, affectionate little maid of the last three days. Her eyes scintillated with fun. She charmed Robert anew, and then again anew even in her contradictions. He began to ask the same strange question that the child, Hartley Coleridge, asked: "How many Hartleys are there?" How many Ambrosias were there? He saw that night as many as the various points of interest or conversation touched.

They spoke of her father's illness and its cause, and Ambrosia, ignoring her previous sympathy, said with a judicial air:

"Men must expect to suffer when they make it the sum total of their lives to go to the office every morning."

Then they passed a very pretty girl, who moved slightly to Ambrosia, but whose greeting she declined to notice.

"That girl is my enemy," she said with a little laugh. "I took her dressmaker from her; and she has said disagreeable things about me in consequence."

"You do not love your enemies, then?" asked the doctor.

"I should think not! I have a mind totally incapable of comprehending such an idea."

"Yet it is a matter of religion."

"Yes, I wish I was religious. It is so sweet and graceful."

Robert looked at her and was perplexed and uncertain. The demure face, the mocking eyes, the independent air puzzled him. Was she in earnest, or not? A carriage passed at the moment, and its occupant bowed to Ambrosia.

"That is Gertrude Jones," she said. "Do you know her, doctor? She is one of the ecclesiastical lilies of Azarius. You should see how beautifully she transacts her religion twice every Sunday ; and what immaculate toilets she wears! They must come from Paris, and they must cost a fortune! Margaret Libby says they always rouse a Judas-envy in her breast. She wants to stop Miss Jones and ask her : ' Why are not those costumes sold and the money given to the poor ? ' Because ' the poor ' are Gertrude's great point. All the young rectors think her angelic !"

"I remember hearing a lady say that Miss Jones dressed as well as an English duchess."

"Oh, what a libel—on Miss Jones! Her toilets are Parisian to the last bow. She is noted for her extravagance in dress. She has more jewels than she can ever wear."

"Is such extravagance right? Is she any happier for it? There is an old proverb which asserts that enough is better—"

"Better than a feast? I prefer the feast, decidedly. There is something enchanting in a splendid waste. I have often wished to buy all the silk and lace I fancy. How my money would slip and slide and glide away like water into sand."

He looked at her with wonder not unmixed with admiration. The audacity with which she contradicted all his previous ideas of her character took him afresh and, as it were, by storm. He was accustomed to women showing him the seamless side of their natures ; but here was a girl who wanted to be religious because it was so sweet and graceful, and who acknowledged frankly that she did not love her enemies and did love to be extravagant.

Then he felt that her moral bravery had smitten him with mental cowardice. She certainly could have no suspicion that he wished to marry her. It would, therefore, be premature to speak to her on that subject; it might, indeed, be wiser to wait until he understood her better. He was silent but a few moments, but Ambrosia divined what he was saying to himself.

"And quite right," was her quick mental response. "I know as little of him as he does of me. I dare say we have both much to learn."

They were at this time on the Avenue, and Robert was walking the horses home. The dusky evening was sweet and warm; there were a few stars in the sky and the lamps were lit on the street. As they passed the Carters' house, Will came to the open window and saw them. Even in that light they were sensible of the brightening of his face and his eager recognition. His pleasure was so vivid as to be communicable.

"That is my brother," said Robert, proudly, "my brother Will. I think it is a good thing to know Will, and I hope you may do so very soon. He is going to Stromberg."

She said she hoped so, and that she was glad he was going to Stromberg; and her voice was low and soft, and her bright face thoughtful, almost sad.

"And we are nearly at the end of our drive, doctor, and I shall remember it very often. It has been such a great pleasure."

She was the first Ambrosia now, and Robert longed even then to say something sweetly definite to her. But she was busy with her wrap, and had so evidently the good-bye air which intimates the end

of an enjoyment that he felt how out of tune any note of love would be in such a commonplace scale.

After all, he had not had the satisfaction he had hoped from the drive. He was happy and yet unhappy. He was in love with two different Ambrosias, and quite sure he had not seen the entire number. How many girls in one were there? Was it possible any could be unlovely—so unlovely as to shadow the beauty of all the others?

Will scouted the idea.

"A pretty lover you are, Robert, to imagine imperfections where you have not even seen it. For my part, I should refuse to believe she had a fault even if it was under my eyes. I am certain she is simply perfect. How old is she?"

"I dare say she is twenty; perhaps more. Between twenty and thirty a New York girl is a sphinx. No man can tell her age. Do you remember those delightful lines of Sappho's you read to me the other night? They describe so well a great number of lovely unmarried girls."

"Yes, I remember:

"O, fair! O, sweet!

As the sweet apple-blooms on the bough,
High on the highest, forgot of the gatherers,
So thou! So thou!"

"That is what I mean. Sweet blooms, but forgot of the gatherers."

"But, Robert, you have only heard the half. The other half explains why forgot of the gatherers:

"Yet not so, not forgot of the gatherers,
But high o'er their reach in the golden air
O, sweet! O, fair!"

High o'er their reach! That tells the tale, Robert.

Women are now so cultured, so learned, so independent, so fastidious—so what-not—that a man has to be a Goliath of self-conceit, to try to reach them. ‘Up in the golden air, so sweet, so fair’ are they ! I do not even try. They would naturally be above my stature. Perhaps some simple country girl will have me.”

“Are you still so ignorant about the country girl ? Of all the daughters of Mr. Worldly-Wise-Man, she is now the cleverest. Her simplicity has become as much a fable as any of Baring-Gould’s Myths of the Middle Ages. She would be deeply offended, if you supposed her one ribbon behind her city sister in the fashions ; or on one cent behind any one, in her appreciation of money. She goes to colleges, and she writes for the newspapers, and she has turned the old farm-house into a villa or a mansion. The country girl is an extinct species. You are too late.”

“We shall see. I am off to Stromberg to-morrow. Summer between stone walls is not summer. I am going to the very tip-top of the highest mountain. I want to be alone, utterly alone, with the earth and the sun for a day or two. Will you come to Stromberg at the week end ?”

“If my business will let me.”

“What a deal of time men waste in business ! Take a month or two, Robert ; a month or two to fall in love and get married.”

“When a woman is as variable as water, how dare you adventure her.”

“There is a safe little boat called ‘matrimony.’ I have read that you could tame the sea if you could only marry it. Every one has a weak point. Incidentally, I heard to-day that Miss Shepherd’s weak

point is her brother Tom—her evasive, elusive, unreliable brother, Tom Shepherd.”

“Have you ever seen him?”

“Never, until to-day. He came into the club this afternoon with Captain Atkins. When they left, I heard the remarks made. They may be true; it is just as likely they are—mistakes.”

“What of his appearance?”

“He is gentlemanly and very handsome. It was mainly young Starit who criticised Shepherd; and you know the Starit family admire only the Starits. Besides, Starit was telling about his trip around the world, and he was annoyed at Shepherd’s interfering with one of his audience.”

“I suppose he has seen wonders.”

“There is an old sailor, in nautical annals, who once from the topmast had a vision of—

‘Jerusalem and Madagaskee,
And North and South Amerikee,
And the British fleet a-ridin’ at anchee,
And Admiral Nelson, K. C. B.’

But that old sailor saw nothing in comparison. For young Starit the earth has surrendered all her marvels. Are you interested in his experiences?”

“Not in the least. I am tired, Will, awfully tired. What time do you go to-morrow? Or shall we say ‘farewell’ to-night?”

“I shall be off when the dapple-gray clouds bring up the dawning; and the happy do not say ‘farewell.’ We shall meet again in a few days.”

“Good night, then, and a happy journey.”

“All right. Get a sound sleep and see Miss Shepherd in the morning.”

But though left to himself, Robert did not go to

sleep. He sat and dreamed, waking ; that was his pleasure, his rest, the way in which he prepared himself for the morrow. He had resolved to be awake when Will left, but he watched just long enough to be in a deep sleep at daybreak. When he returned to himself the sun was high and the world was busy.

He went to Broadway and sent flowers to Ambrosia ; but he resolved not to call at Mr. Shepherd's until the afternoon. Just as he was thinking of going there, he saw Ambrosia on the Avenue. She had a gentleman with her. He was talking earnestly to her, and Ambrosia, walking with downcast eyes and gravely listening, was beautiful as a woman could be.

As he passed, she raised her head and gave him one magical glance. But after this a perverse contradiction kept them apart. He called every day on Mr. Shepherd ; he delayed his visits beyond all medical reason ; but Ambrosia was always out. She had shopping to do, her step-mother said, and a *modiste* to wait upon and her arrangements to make with the library and friends to call upon, etc.

It mattered little to Robert what was the cause of her absence, the fact of it was the trial he had to contend with. And he did not conceal from Mrs. Shepherd that it was a very hard trial. For when a man has decided that a certain good thing is within his reach and then finds continual obstacles in his way, he cannot help the sensation of being rather cruelly dealt with.

And he missed Will so much. He had no one to talk to ; no one at least to urge him to do the thing he wished to do ; the only kind of advice that is ac-

ceptable. Indeed, after Ambrosia had left New York, he was so restless and unhappy that he invited a very wise old friend to dine, and then to him partially revealed the state of his heart.

And this friend followed the usual laws prescribed for such a condition—he warned Robert against the wiles of women and the dangers attending marriage. He used several young men of his own acquaintance as warning and morals to point his lecture, and Doctor Carter listened attentively, and answered :

“Your advice, captain, may be all very good and so forth ; and in fact it is very good and so forth—but—but—but—” and he shook his friend’s hand and went off through Madison Square, whispering to himself : “But it does not answer my case ; not at all ”



CHAPTER III.

EVERY FATE HAS ITS HOUR.

“ A girl with her heart untouched,
In the happy morning of life and May.”

“ It wanteth but a little wind,
To make the blossoms fall ;
It wanteth but a brave fond lover,
To win me, heart and all.”

“ For all things come by fate to flower
At their unconquerable hour.”

There was a reason for the perverse fatality which appeared to keep Doctor Carter and Ambrosia apart. It was a fatality which had its origin in Ambrosia's will. She had been alarmed by the rapid growth of her intimacy with Doctor Carter. She saw that he was a man likely to be very much and very eagerly in earnest, and she was not quite sure of her inclinations. She liked him, but—oh, dear!—she did not wish to have that liking catachised—at any rate, just yet. A woman may desire with all her heart to take a certain road, but she still prefers to dally a little with what possibilities are left ; she wants some sentimental retrospections ; some interesting tremors ;

some delays; and some encouragements for the future.

"Of course, I shall have to marry," she said to her step-mother; "but matrimony is like a close, high gate; any girl wishes to stand a little while, with her hand upon the latch."

"I never saw you so timid before, Amber."

"Ah, the others were different. I knew they meant no more than I did, but Doctor Carter is in earnest. He will ask me to be his wife, and if I say 'yes' I shall be his wife before I know what has happened. It is the irrevocable which makes me hesitate."

"He will be here this morning."

"I cannot see him this morning. I have had a letter from Cousin Bessie. She wants me *very particularly*. I have not seen Bessie for a week, and I do not know what she is going to do this summer."

Now every girl has a chosen confidante, to whom she imparts her triumphs and as many of her failures and annoyances as she thinks conduce to make her enviable and interesting. And Bessie Madison was not only Ambrosia's confidante, she was also her cousin. They had liked each other, been jealous of each other, quarreled and made up quarrels, all of their conscious lives, and were still upon terms of womanly friendship, which, however, is friendship of an exceedingly delicate character.

So, after her drive with Doctor Carter, Ambrosia felt a natural desire to see her cousin Bessie. She said: "I am anxious about Uncle Madison, who has not been feeling well lately. Bessie spoke of getting him to take an ocean voyage. I wish he and Bessie would go and take me with them."

"I should not like you to go, Ambrosia, in the present state of your father's health."

"I dare say father would like me to go—but I shall stay with you, of course. I do hope Bessie is going—and I must see uncle. I have been quite uneasy about him."

Mrs. Shepherd was not deceived by this pretended interest in Uncle Madison ; and Ambrosia knew she was not deceived. But the wonderful thing in this tacit understanding between women is that such bits of deception are universally accepted and, if necessary, defended. Both women were well aware that Ambrosia wished to discuss Doctor Carter ; but both tacitly agreed that the discussion should be called "Uncle Madison and an Ocean Voyage."

Ambrosia dressed herself with as much care as if she were going to a *matinée*. Doctors went into all parts of the city ; besides, she intended to return by Broadway ; and the possibilities and probabilities of Broadway are beyond even a woman's divination. It was also a lovely morning, and the sunshine tempted her to put on her newest spring costume. Amber never reasoned away such enticements : "What are really nice temptations for if you do not give way to them?" she asked herself, softly, as she smoothed down the perfectly fitting basque and made reflections on the becoming character of tailor-made suits.

She was trig and pretty, so like a jaunty song-bird in its fresh spring plumage, that she resolved to parade herself upon the Avenue a little, before visiting her cousin. And as she walked, she met her brother Tom. He was going to the Hoffman for his breakfast, and he said :

"Turn back a few blocks with me, Amber. You

are as pretty as a picture this morning. I want to talk to you about father."

And it was as she walked by his side, listening to his grave complaints about the business, that she met Doctor Carter. And, as the doctor did not know her companion was Tom Shepherd, he was annoyed. An irritable, what-is-the-matter feeling possessed him all through his business; and as he did not see Ambrosia when he called on Mr. Shepherd in the afternoon, he took the fretful question home with him, and found it trouble both his dinner and his rest.

Ambrosia had no such uncomfortable companion. It rather pleased her to speculate upon the doctor's curiosity. She either saw, or fancied she saw, a shadow of painful chagrin on his face; and she was not averse to him feeling some of the minor pangs of jealousy.

"Thank goodness, it was Tom," she mused. "Tom is handsome and well-dressed and young. I do not want Doctor Carter to think that my drive with him has driven the images of all other men out of my horizon. I wonder how he feels?"

She had the faint smile of this wonder on her lips when she reached her cousin's home. It was a large house on the Avenue, but extending westward down the adjacent street. The windows were open, their sills full of flowers and the lace curtains behind softly blowing in the southern breeze. But the hall was dusk and cool; and as soon as she was well in its shadow she saw her cousin Bessie standing at the head of the first flight of stairs.

"I saw you coming, Amber. I was watching for you. I knew you would be here this morning. I am so glad! Isn't it warm?"

She was talking in such little sentences all the time that Ambrosia leisurely climbed toward her. And the picture she made on the dusky stairway was a very pretty one. She was such a slight little woman ; she had such black hair ; such brown eyes ; such delicate features and such exquisite color on her oval cheeks ! She was dressed in white, and she held out her small hands, flashing with diamonds, toward her cousin with such a charming expression of welcome in them.

"I am so glad to see you, Amber ! How is Uncle Ambrose ? And Mrs. Shepherd ? I said to father, this morning, I *felt* you were coming. What a pretty costume ! Tailor-made. Redfern, of course ; no other maker keeps himself up to his ideal so perfectly. Not a wrinkle ! Not the shadow of one !"

"It is pretty, and it *does* fit well," answered Ambrosia, as she turned herself round before Bessie's long mirror.

"But it must be uncomfortable. Take it off. Here is a nice wrapper. We are going to have something to eat and a long talk. *Whew !* I know how delicious is that long sigh when the last button is loosed. Take off your boots, too, Amber. They are lovely, but I dare say they pinch ; mine always do."

"They are a little tight."

"Then take them off, and make your feet happy, also."

As Ambrosia leisurely obeyed these directions, Bessie struck a small hand-bell, and a girl answered it.

"Daly," she said, "we will have lunch here ; some chicken salad and two sherbets and chocolate. Be sure to whip the cream ; and, Daly, some fresh strawberries and plenty of cream for the berries." Then.

turning to Ambrosia, who had slipped into a large soft chair: "Isn't it nice to be natural? No wonder the Greek women were graceful and elegant. They did not have to wear corsets."

"I wonder if they ever grew stout?"

"Of course not. The idea is an impossible one. They would never think of such a thing. But I have heard—of course, I do not credit it—but I have heard, really, that Miss Longview sleeps in her corset."

"Who told you, Bessie?"

"Lemarque told me. She said: 'There is some pleasure in making dresses for Miss Longview. *She* is so anxious to do her costumer justice that she sleeps in her corsets. As for Miss Madison!' Then she sighed and gave me one of her hatefulest shrugs."

"Are you having many new dresses made?"

"No. I expect to go to France with the Martynes, and, of course—"

"Of course!" with an understanding nod. "But I never dreamed of your going abroad with the Martynes. Why did you not send me word?"

"It was only decided last night. I wrote once. You know, father, dear father, is so opposed to me going to Europe without him. I believe he has an idea that Frenchmen and Germans and Austrians and especially Englishmen go about like roaring lions seeking American girls to devour. At first father said he would go, and then he found he could not go; so I am to be attached to Mrs. Martyne's party."

"Well, she knows the world—that is, the best society on the planet. I suppose Ella Martyne will be your companion."

"Yes, she is going."

"Do you like Ella?"

"She is a nice girl, if she would not sing such very fine music; but when she tries the 'Jewel Song' or 'Casta Diva' I just shiver. I can't help it."

"They are not easy things to sing."

"Then why should Ella try to sing them? It would be so very easy *not to*. Still, I like Ella; and she is so clever. Did you know that she has published her poems?"

"I did not know that she had written any poems."

"Quite a bookful. Her mother is very proud of them, though she says: 'Nonsense! Nonsense! Only the overflow of little Ella's heart! The child is very emotional!'"

"Where can I get a copy?"

"At Brentano's, of course. They are published cheaply at a dollar and sweetly at two dollars—white and gold and vignettes and so on."

"Have you a copy?"

"No, I did not buy one. I thought Ella would be sure to give me one. It does seem like wasting money to buy books, unless it be a very nice novel. Novels tell you something about love, and love has something to do with marriage, and marriage is a woman's destiny, is it not, Amber?"

"Those who pretend to be well acquainted with the intentions of Providence say so. But if they are right, I think Providence is very unfair to the ugly girls."

"But have you noticed that novelists are now making their heroines quite plain? It is the girl with eyes full of intellect and a massive forehead that gets the hero now."

"On paper, they may carry all before them ; but in real life there is not a bit of change, Bessie. Men keep right on reading about the good, intelligent, plain girls, but they marry the pretty ones always. Ella Martyne is a plain girl, but she is apparently brimful of intellect. So you can make observations this summer on a plain girl's chances. I dare say Ella will travel and scribble and, no doubt, she will get you to do the same."

"If so, I hope I shall be given sense enough to keep the scribbling to myself. Ella says the pleasure she most anticipates is a visit to all the great libraries of Europe."

"Poor Ella! To make her little bricks what a large supply of straw she must require."

"Here is lunch. Are you hungry? I hope so. I did not care for breakfast this morning. I wonder if we shall have such nice things to eat when we go to strange places. I wish Mrs. Shepherd was here to eat a sherbet. She always seems to enjoy a sherbet. Sit still, Amber. Daly will push the table close to you."

She was hovering round the tray, full of delicacies, with the sweetest little intentions of hospitality. For to make people happy was one of the most extensive "views" of Bessie Madison's life. She had no "missions" of any other kind ; no scientific proclivities ; no theological doubts or social problems to perplex her. She was a very ordinary young lady, with large affections and small passions and mild prejudices. She was thoroughly attached to her own family, ladylike, sympathetic, safe and tolerably sincere with the world. And it is very doubtful if any who loved her would have been willing to dis-

turb her innocent freshness and joyousness of nature for the sake of any deeper knowledge.

The two girls, in their cool, loose garments, with the dainty cups poised in their hands, their faces flushing and smiling, their lips parted in merry laughter and exclamations, were really a pretty picture; all the more so that they had no idea they were charming.

"Is it not a lovely day? And, pray, where are you going this summer, Amber? To the Branch, as usual, I suppose?"

"No. We are going to Stromberg. It is father's native place, and Doctor Carter thinks the air may benefit him."

"How is Uncle Ambrose? It is so hard to think of him as ill. I am glad you have Doctor Carter. He cured a lady who lives near here, when every one thought her past hope."

"Is he so clever?"

"My dear, he is very famous."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Sometimes I noticed him getting in and out of his carriage. I thought he was quite handsome, but formal and stately. I should imagine he was uncomfortable when his hands were not in kid gloves."

"Oh, you are quite mistaken! He took me for a ride in the Park, and he was real nice, quite inclined to make—well, to be very attentive."

"Fancy that! Why, I thought doctors looked on every one as a patient."

Ambrosia laughed.

"You are thinking of the dog in the fable, Bessie. He supposed that men had been invented to take care of dogs. It is a very common way to look at

life. Lemarque thinks you and I and sundry others were invented for her to dress. Grocers think of humanity as stomachs to be filled. Teachers, as pupils to be informed. Managers, as fools to be amused. So, perhaps, doctors do regard us all as patients to be cured. Sometimes, however, a doctor may think of a probable patient as a probable wife."

"That is true ; and if he cures your father, you would be very grateful ; but, then, you would not feel that you must marry him out of gratitude, would you ?"

"I do not know. I suppose you expect to marry for love ?"

"For love only. I have very fixed opinions on that subject, I can tell you."

"But, Bessie, you will have to get your lover before you go into heroics about him. I declare I do not believe that men care about being loved now. They want a wife that can be a credit to them, that they are proud of—a wife that is a visible 'getting on in the world.'"

"How would you know if a man is really in love, Amber ? What kind of love is the genuine article ? You have had lovers ; now, what kind do you like best ? How do you want to be loved ?"

"I will tell you how I long to be loved ! How does your mastiff Sultan love your father and you ? He does not care a pin's worth whether you are rich or poor, good or bad, respectable or not respectable ; all he asks is *that you love him*. Now, I would like a lover to love me in that canine way—

'From Ambrosia to Ambrosia'

to be the limit of his thoughts. Of course, I shall never find such a lover. They do not exist now."

"Just as much as ever they did. Plenty of men love like that. I suppose we should have to love back quite as foolishly. Say his name was Harry; then—

'From Harry unto Harry'

would be the limit of our thoughts. I really think that would be a heaven upon earth. Don't you, Amber?"

"For people who liked that kind of thing, it would be the kind of thing they would like. I am not sure I should like it. I hope you may find the lover you are dreaming about when you are in Europe. Some way, one expects romance in Europe; in America it feels exotic."

"Unless he was an American, I should only find to lose him. Father says there are plenty of Americans to pick and choose from. I suppose, if I marry at all, it will be to some man made to father's order; and I cannot expect father's ideal to be my ideal."

"After all, Bessie, marrying is the state of passing from freedom into slavery."

"May be. But the remedy is in our hands. We are not forced to marry, and the slavery that is voluntary is no great hardship, is it? I should like to be married before I am twenty. After twenty brides do not look so interesting."

Thus they talked and wondered and speculated, until the luncheon was eaten; and then the heaviness of the middle of the day stole on them, and they fell asleep, with their heads on the same pillow. And the window being a little open, the shade wavered in the breeze, and a ray of sunshine played hide-and-seek among their scattered hair, brown and black, and made their closed eyelids luminously

white and their pink cheeks and lips luminously rosy. But no one coming in, however hastily, could for a moment have doubted that this was the soft, warm sleep of youth and beauty—even if the white draperies had not been colored by touches of pink and blue ribbon and the flash of diamonds on Bessie's hands.

When they awakened it was after three, and they lay still, looking at the clock on the mantel, and promising themselves to get up and dress as soon as it was four. And meanwhile they talked to more purpose of Bessie's voyage and the presents she was to bring home—until a sudden thought struck Bessie, and she sat up in bed and looked at Amber, in order to give it emphasis.

"Perhaps, you may be married when I get home again—to the—doctor!"

Ambrosia neither laughed nor yet denied the supposition. She was admiring her white, well-formed hands, and she let her eyes fall upon the finger which might wear the wedding-ring.

"But I should think you would not, dear Amber."

"Of course, I shall not, Bessie. Why, he has not even asked me yet!"

"But he intends to ask you?"

"Yes. He intends to ask me."

"How can you tell that?"

"Well, if you see a rosebud you naturally expect there will be a rose. And given certain signs in a lover, you naturally expect the lover will grow into the husband."

"What signs?"

"Are you really so ignorant? Well, Bessie, this is a subject you have instinctive knowledge about.

Nobody can teach a bird how to build its nest. Nobody can teach a girl how to know a genuine lover. All the same *she knows him on sight*. I have had many lovers before Doctor Carter but only one real lover."

"Was that Fred?"

"Yes, that was Fred. But then Fred was ineligible in many ways."

"There was Harry Stafford."

"Harry Stafford will never marry *any* woman ; that is another subject girls have instinctive knowledge about. Harry Stafford, John Eccles and Lyman Whitney are certain old bachelors. They carry a Cain-mark on their brows, so that no woman shall marry them ; and women know it ! There is not a girl in our set who minds one word they say. Any of us would as soon think of marrying a patriarch of the Greek Church. It is only a question of time, and they will disappear from all drawing-rooms and retire, lonely and forgotten, to the cushions of their club sofa and the tyranny of the servants who keep bachelor apartments."

Ambrosia was buttoning her boots as she passed this terrible sentence, and she gave her foot a little stamp to emphasize its truth ; and then she began to dress herself for the street. Bessie lay still on the bed, watching her cousin.

"I like to see you do your hair, Amber," she said. "Your arms are so pretty, and they appear to be performing some mystic dance among your brown braids and curls. I think you are real pretty."

"Yes, I know I am real pretty."

"And when a girl is pretty, diamonds and gold bracelets and ornaments of all kinds seem so natural.

I like my diamonds so much ! Why do you not wear some diamonds ?”

“ I have not many—only a scarf-pin and a pair of earrings. I intend to give my husband the pleasure of diamonding me and of otherwise attending to my decoration.”

“ Every one likes such decorations.”

“ I suppose every one does. In point of fact, decoration comes before dress. Savages insist on being painted, whether they can afford a blanket or not.”

“ Now, Amber, do be a nice girl.”

“ Pray what is a nice girl, Bessie ?”

“ A girl that likes what other people like and does what other people do. One feels safe and comfortable with such girls.”

“ Then let us be safe and comfortable by all means.”

“ Are you going to walk home ?”

“ There is the stage and the Fourth Avenue cars, but both are crowded now. I hate street-car crowds.”

“ Is there a dog-show or a flower-show ?”

“ Bessie Madison ! Do you pretend to keep house and not know the more delicate—I may say, the more respectable—articles of food have been scarce and dear within the last few days ? Have you been out of the house and not noticed the unusual number of gentlemen in white neckties and ladies in rich, neutral-tinted dresses ? I am sure the worldly New Yorker has had plenty of signs that May meetings have begun.”

“ I do not mind a crowd of that kind ; they are so sweet and respectable.”

“ Yes ; the respectable is their line, and they suc-

ceed in it. I suppose you will sail on next Wednesday?"

"Yes. Oh! I forgot to tell you that Mrs. and Miss Petwyn go as far as Liverpool with us. Miss Petwyn is to be 'introduced' to the queen on this visit. You should hear her talk about 'her majesty' and 'Albion.'"

"I should like to hear her talk. I think American girls *katow* far too much to her majesty. I do not believe Miss Petwyn has yet made her obeisance to the divine Frances, who is really the present representative of our own 'majestic' Republic. When I go to England, I shall go to see the country and not curtsy to the queen."

"The queen is such a good woman. Mrs. Petwyn says it is the duty of Americans to show they respect her entirely respectable and virtuous character."

"Entirely respectable and virtuous characters are not unknown in this country. However, I have nothing to say against Victoria. She always has been the best of monarchs and, as far as I can see, Albion rules her everlasting waves with the same old propriety. How do you like this hat?"

"It is very becoming. Now, Amber, we must do our shopping together; so do be here early every day, and bring the list to-morrow of the things Mrs. Shepherd wishes me to get for her in France."

"I will. Good-bye, dear Bessie!"

"And bring me word about the doctor!"

"There will be no word. I shall keep out of his way for a week."

"Is that a good plan?"

"*Very.*"

She said the word on the outside of Bessie's room-

door. Bessie was on the other side, and the door was a little bit open. In the aperture their faces met for a moment, and then Amber went slowly down the stairs and out into the street.

After this interview, Ambrosia was at Bessie's every day, and the girls were continually out together on their never-ending real or imaginary wants. And so Doctor Carter always missed the face he longed to see. And whether it was fate or Mrs. Shepherd that planned their next meeting, is undetermined. Mrs. Shepherd thought she might, in the doctor's presence, have named Bessie Madison's voyage; and she might have made some remark, leading Doctor Carter to believe that Ambrosia would be at the steamer to see Bessie away.

At any rate, Ambrosia and her brother Tom went down to the steamer and, while they were chatting with Bessie's party, Ambrosia saw Doctor Carter talking to a lady who was evidently astonished and delighted with such attention from her physician. And how it happened, Ambrosia never very clearly understood, but when the last bell rang and the visitors were crowding the gangway for the dock, Doctor Carter was at her side; he had her hand in his hand and, in some irresistible way, he had taken possession of her.

Then her coupé was out of sight, and Tom was not to be found, and the doctor and his buggy were both so eagerly at her service that the pressure of events bore her with them; and in a few minutes she was driving along Seventh Avenue at the quickest permissible speed. It was scarcely ten o'clock and a cool, sunshiny morning. The doctor had said: "Shall we drive to the Park?" "Yes, let us drive

to the Park." And Ambrosia had not been able to put in a negative.

The sense of proprietorship grew stronger every moment between them. It was so sweet! Ambrosia leaned imperceptibly toward her lover, and he leaned toward her. She glanced shyly into his face, and the glance was met by a beaming, penetrating, unwinking gaze of eager love. She understood the question in that gaze. She let it sink into her heart. The silence was trembling with emotion. She was almost glad when they reached a shady place and the doctor allowed his horses to walk. Then he turned his face full upon her. He spoke her name. She answered him only with a blush and a tremor, which he could feel. Again he spoke her name.

"Ambrosia!"

"Yes."

"My dearest girl, I love you. I love you so well, so entirely, that I cannot be happy if you do not love me a little—I mean, if you do not love me a great deal in return."

She was smiling and blushing divinely, and there was something in her very silence that gave him confidence.

"I want to marry you. I want to have you near me all my life. What do you say? Is there any one that you love better than me?"

"No; there is not."

"Do you think you can love me soon?"

"Yes; it will not be very difficult."

"You mean that you will really be my wife?"

"Yes."

Then he found all the words he had looked for in vain during the previous days. He was so eloquent,

so eager, so full of hopes and plans that Ambrosia became not only receptive but responsive. And the pleasant motion and the fresh breeze and the sunshine and the flowers and twittering birds, all seemed a part of the delightful confidence. Yea, and it was only intensified by the familiar noise of the horses and carriages on the Avenue and the murmur of Broadway near by.

It was one o'clock ; they had been three hours revealing themselves to each other. But what were three hours? For as Robert Carter lifted his betrothed from the buggy he said :

"Henceforward, Amber, for all our lives, for all eternity, we two are one."

And she gave him her hand, and they went into the house together.

Mr. Shepherd had come down-stairs to lunch, and was in high spirits.

"I am beginning to long for Wall Street, doctor!" he cried.

And then the doctor told him what had happened between himself and Ambrosia ; and the matter was talked over with perfect amiability and understanding. Ambrosia was kissed and congratulated, but already she felt as if some of the sweetness and exclusiveness of love's avowal had vanished. She could not eat, and her lover could not eat, and they went into the parlor where she had first sat with him, and he reminded her of the rose at her throat that day and of the petals that he gathered from it and put into her hand. And she made him blush scarlet with pleasure when she whispered :

"I have the rose-leaves yet. They were your first offering. I saved every leaf."

They were so happy telling each other they were so happy that they heeded not how the time went by. And yet their happiness had brought its inevitable shadow with it. In the dining-room something hopeful had passed away. Mrs. Shepherd's attentions and pleasantries fell upon heedless ears. The sick man pushed aside his plate. His appetite was gone in a moment. He was somber and silent. He felt unable to echo his wife's exclamations of gratification or to discuss the probabilities of such an excellent alliance. For a little while he listened, and then he said, with a pathetic look of entreaty for tolerance :

"I will talk to-morrow, Clara. I am glad for Amber's sake. God bless the child ! But I feel—I feel—like old Jacob—bereft. I have lost my health and my business and now my daughter. It is the end of the day with me."

"Ambrose, you have still your wife. If you lose everything—everything—I shall only love you more."

And she went to his side and drew his poor aching weary head to her breast, and kissed his lips and kissed his tears away, and showed him a lavish affection which was not usual to her self-contained nature—an affection whose sweetest tenderness happiness never knows.

In the next room it was the beginning of the day. The very dawn of love's fair hour, for Robert and Ambrosia. Who could grudge them a moment of its delicious dreaming? If Bessie had asked Ambrosia now what love was like, she would have answered :

"It is like an anchor. I have been drifting

hither and thither. I am at home and at rest, now. I am full of content from head to feet. And I love the man dearly, upon whose heart I may henceforward lean."

Yet Robert was the more passionate lover of the two; which was well and right. He had been wont to smile at the love-scenes in novels and plays and operas. He had thought them over-drawn. Now they seemed entirely too cold and tame. He had thought them even ridiculous. It had appeared to him incredible that men should ever make such fools of themselves. And he could now recall without a blush his adoration of Ambrosia's beauty, his extravagant delight at her acceptance of his love. Indeed, he was sure the extravagance, under the circumstances, was the only proper way of expressing feelings which had no earthly value or parallel.

And it made him smile happily to find himself, on his return home, hunting through a volume of poetry for four verses Will had marked specially for him, saying as he did so:

"You will want them some day soon, Robert. Then you can write me a 'thank you, Will.' I do not expect it now."

And so Robert smiled as he turned the leaves, having a shrewd idea they were about the middle of the volume, and finding them there without much trouble, which circumstance, he told himself, was a happy sign:

"*Heinrich Heine's*," he said. "Well, Heine, speak for me."

And he was so pleased with what Heine said, that the next day he went to his bookseller and ordered

a set of Heine. And when it came home, the first verses he turned to were the ones Will had marked for him :

“ How bravely is the little body fashioned,
Her deep-blue eye, how fairy-like it shines,
She stands upon her small foot, firmly stationed,
A form, wherein with strength, all grace combines.

“ Her cordial voice, it sounds so frank and gracious ;
Revealing all her soul without eclipse ;
And all she says is thoughtful and sagacious,
And like a pair of rosebuds are her lips.

“ It is not love upon my senses stealing,
My reason undiseased is at command ;
Yet wondrously her being thrills my being,
As tremblingly, I stoop to kiss her hand.

“ I think that at the last I culled a flower
And gave it to her ; speaking clear and free,
Yea, be my wife, ‘ Ambrosia,’ from this hour,
That I, like thee, may pure and happy be.”



CHAPTER IV.

LOVE'S SWEET AND BITTER.

"As for the rest, I only plead with grief—
'I did not think the time could be so brief.'"

O, Love, they wrong thee much,
Who say thy sweet is bitter ;
When thy rich fruit is such
As nothing can be sweeter.

—*From Elizabethan Lyric.*

It was a hot day in August, so hot, that to read or write was to achieve a moral conquest over bodily and mental inertia ; and Ambrosia was considering the likelihood of the weather climaxing in a thunder-storm.

"That would put a stop to Mrs. Smith's tennis-party," she said with a soft triumph. "And certainly, Mrs. Smith's tennis-parties ought to be stopped."

"What are you saying, Amber?"

Amber repeated the assertion, and Mrs. Shepherd added :

"I cannot understand why lawn tennis has become so popular ! Not one woman in a thousand runs de-

cently, and their clothing gets out of order, soiled and uncomfortable. How has it become fashionable?"

"It is past my comprehension; especially as it is neither expensive nor unhealthy nor wicked. I suppose it may be because it furnishes a cheap and easy way to entertain bores and nobodies. However, simple as it is, Mrs. Smith does not understand how to serve refreshment at tennis."

"I thought she had excellent teas."

"But fancy sitting down to a table twenty feet long for a cup of tea! It conveyed an absolutely solemn feeling to my mind."

"The twenty feet of table were required, I think."

"But how much more chatty and delightful little tables scattered about would have been. On these little tables she could have placed the fruit and cake and ices, and the tea and coffee should have been carried round; and there ought to have been plenty of garden-chairs, placed in pairs, each pair out of ear-shot of the other. I know what it is to be one of four or six on the same seat. However, all things considered, lawn tennis is not more objectionable than many of the other entertainments which help to make life miserable."

Mrs. Shepherd did not answer, and Ambrosia turned and looked inquisitively at her.

"You are ill or very unhappy, Clara. I have suspected one or the other for several days. I think you ought to tell me if anything is vexing or paining you."

Then Clara rose, and, lifting her parasol, motioned to Amber to follow her. She led the way to a seat under some large trees, and said softly:

"I am so afraid of the servants finding out things.

Here we can talk and they cannot come unsuspected within hearing. Amber, I am in great trouble. I have been miserable for three weeks."

"Is it my father? I have noticed that he has been most unreasonable—quite unlike himself."

"That is true, Amber. Robert's fears are being sadly realized. Your father will never more go to Wall Street. I have persuaded him to buy the Mayberry farm. He was born on it. It will soon be all we shall have."

"What do you mean, Clara? Father's business—"

"He left it in Tom's charge. Tom is not your father. Tom seems to have no idea of right and wrong. I cannot get a cent of money from him. At first he was full of excuses, now he does not even answer my letters."

"How can Tom be so wicked? Father ought not to have trusted Tom with money. He must have known that any stranger would have been better."

"Your father broke down in a moment, Amber. He had no time for planning or preparation. Naturally, he turned to Tom. He had a right to expect more from him than from a stranger."

"But Tom conjugates the whole world by the letter 'I,' and you knew this, Clara!"

"But when the thing is done, it is too late to say what ought to have been done. Your father's business career is over."

"What are we to do?"

"I can manage a farm. I was brought up on one. You are happily provided for. This knowledge makes the rest more endurable."

"You mean that I will marry Robert soon?"

"Yes. He loves you and you love him."

"Marrying is an important and final thing. It ought not to be done in a hurry."

"Amber, do not fritter away so much love and happiness. How could you live on Mayberry farm and do hard work and be compelled to count every cent and to be anxious about simple food and clothing?"

"*Hush!* Here comes Will! Good morning, sir. Where have you been so early? Are you not afraid of the heat?"

"Sunshine is life to me. And I have been to the Dutch gardener for some flowers."

"For which you paid twice as much as they were worth."

"Perhaps I did, for—

' In matters of commerce, the fault of the Dutch
Is giving too little and asking too much.'

Not their fault alone. Earth gets a price for all it gives us. We bargain even for the graves we must lie in.

' 'T is heaven alone that is given away ;
'T is only God may be had for the asking. ' "

Mrs. Shepherd smiled sympathetically and then rose and returned to the house.

Ambrosia sat still. Her eyes were cast down ; there was the shadow of trouble in them. She almost feared Will's clear gaze ; he was harder to deceive than his brother Robert.

"I have just heard that my father is not likely to recover his former self. I am very unhappy, Will. And so many men like father—men in the prime of life—come home some day from Wall Street and never go back again. There was Captain James and

Mr. Brookes and a dozen more, that in my short life I remember."

"Yes, I think the Share List represents as many tears, as much orphanage, widowhood, starvation and misery, as much savage because deliberate cruelty as all the riot and rapine of the Dark Ages. Robert told me of your father's condition. I am very sorry. It is pitiful when sorrow is all."

Will spoke with a stern gravity, and there was a few moments' silence. Then Amber asked :

"Are you going to the Smiths this afternoon?"

"No. I am going to Burton's orchard. There is a certain Mrs. Oriole living there, and her daughters are to make their *début* this afternoon. I promised her to come and see their first attempt at flying. Annie and Jane Smith and Sarah and Floy Round flopping about after a ball are not graceful objects; but Mrs. and the Miss Orioles, darting through the cherry trees, are among the 'things of beauty that are joys forever.'"

"Will, do be honest. You know it is because you cannot go to Mrs. Smith's without the proper toilet that you prefer the society of the Orioles. You like to go where you can dress in your own way?"

"There is truth in that. I can dress myself always, Amber, without waiting for orders from Paris."

"Where is Robert this morning?"

"He went hurriedly to New York last night. You know he cannot stay away long from you. He had a consultation—not with doctors—but with Italian fresco painters. He is having the house made beautiful for your reception, Amber."

"He did not tell me so."

"Then, when he explains his late frequent absences, do be as surprised and pleased as possible. Oh, Amber! How happy we shall all be! What a fortunate man Robert is! Also, how fortunate I am! I have longed so much for a sister. You and I will be great friends. We always have been great friends. You seemed to take to me, and to trust in me, from the first?"

She looked straight at him with sweet and evident confidence. Then she laid her hands in his, and said:

"Always friends, Will. Faithful brother and sister. And if anything ever goes wrong—any cross word—any little trouble between Robert and myself, you will stand by me and help to make every one happy again?"

"I will stand by you, always."

"Right or wrong?"

"There is no wrong in the question. You could not do anything wrong."

His clear eyes were misty with feeling, and Ambrosia instantly detected the presence of something that might become sentiment. She laughed lightly and stood up, saying:

"It is very warm, indeed. Let us go to the house."

"All right. Amber, supposing I were you, I think I should be less exacting with Robert. He does so earnestly try to please you."

"Supposing you were I, Will, would you not do precisely as I do?"

"You have asked me a very puzzling question, Amber. If I could answer it, how wise I would be! Have you ever studied metaphysics?"

"Certainly not. The name is enough. There was

a class at Miss Dean's school that took up 'the intellectual powers,' and I was in it. It was all Greek to me. Last winter, Mrs. Shepherd persuaded me to go to a course of lectures. They had a very learned name—I have forgotten what; and I went. Well, Will, I heard so much about the unknown and the unknowable, the verities and the eternities, that I began to say: 'If I be Amber Shepherd, as I suppose I be,' and the Mother-Goose rhyme seemed just as profound." Then suddenly all the mirthful scorn went out of her face, and she said with a marked solemnity: "After six weeks of it, I will tell you what I did one morning. I went softly into an open church and threw myself at the feet of the Holy Crucified One."

"My dear Amber! How glad I am to hear you say this!"

"Humanity, progress and the unknown may be grand ideals; but I want a *heart*—a *divine heart*—to pity my weakness and to love me through all my folly. When do you expect Robert?"

"By the two o'clock train. Yet he may be later. Do you know, Amber, he was quite jealous of that tall, good-looking youth who was so assiduous in waiting on you last Friday night?"

Ambrosia laughed scornfully.

"Jealous of Willy Strong! Willy is only a ball-player. His vision never takes in anything larger than a ball. Willy was born into this world to 'pitch,' and he sees no other beauty or duty. I hope Robert will find himself a more respectable rival. I hope he will refrain himself from being jealous at all. I take it as an offense. I like to be trusted. I shall expect a husband to trust me

even against his seven senses. Has a man seven senses?"

"Has a woman?"

"She has perhaps some that men have lost, or at least she has intimations of them. Will you come into lunch?"

"No, thank you. I shall go back to the hotel and wait for Robert."

He smiled a farewell, and went out into the lonely country road. He was the only figure in sight, and Ambrosia felt there was a kind of pathos in the long, empty fields; they had a weary look, as if their own sameness oppressed them. It was a fleeting and not very accurate impression; for though there is doubtless no speech or language where Nature's voice is not heard, yet the understanding thereof is a far less general thing. Ambrosia had few sympathies with Nature; she did not even care to understand her. If Will had not been a rich man, she would have regarded his communion with her as an indefensible waste of time.

She went into the house, lifting at the threshold a heavy weight of anxiety. Mr. Shepherd was downstairs talking hopefully of the new life which was his only prospect. He was going to ride over to the Mayberry farm, and he was full of plans for the improvement of the place.

"If I am to turn farmer, Clara," he said, with a brave little laugh, "I am going to farm on the very latest principles. I shall advertise for a progressive man to help me; and for your sake I will have some additions built as soon as possible."

Full of such intentions, he went off in buoyant spirits, and Clara watched him until he was out of

sight. Then the two women looked at each other and sank—each of them—to the level of their sad hearts. Clara sat perfectly still for a few moments. Ambrosia had her hands restlessly in her hair, a trick common enough with those who are puzzled and anxious. She spoke first.

“If we could only get rid of the servants; only have our sorrows to ourselves; only weep without prying eyes watching our tears! Oh, Clara, if we could only be alone!”

“If the horse could only rid itself of its bridle! If the bird could only get out of its cage! Come into my room. There is a possibility of seclusion there. What was Will saying to you? Anything about Robert?”

“He asked me to be kinder to Robert. He says Robert loves me so much. I know that.”

“Has he spoken to you of the marriage-day?”

“I have always put off the question. It is my fault the day is not settled. I never dreamed of you being in such trouble. And I wished to keep myself free as long as possible. I am only twenty. At twenty, there are all kinds of possibilities. I have not felt quite sure about some things. Robert is a little of the tyrant. He has had his own way so long. He has got used to telling men and women to do this and that. It was a kind of pleasure to feel that at least he could not order the wedding-day. Robert is nearly forty, and sure of all his desires. I, as I said, am only twenty; and I have vague fears that I am hurrying forward my life. My dear Clara, what are we to do? Have you any plan for the future?”

“First of all, I must have money. Your father thinks Tom sends all that is necessary. It would be

cruel to tell him that Tom does not send a dollar ; because he would insist on going to New York, and that might be the end of all, as far as he is concerned."

"Are you going to see Tom?"

"It would be quite useless. Tom never liked me. Indeed it suited him precisely to keep his step-mother for a standing grievance. It permitted him to live away from his home."

"Shall I go and see Tom?"

"You might try and do something with him. But money is an immediate, pressing necessity. Somehow, in some way, by the kind of instinct that reveals carrion to vultures, Bridget and Molly have scented trouble—money trouble—in the house. Sickness they like ; it gives them opportunities of all kinds. Quarreling they enjoy ; it provides them something to wonder over. But money embarrassments might curtail their luxuries or make delay in their wages, and they smell it out and resent it as if it were a private wrong."

"I thought Molly insolent this morning."

"I could not pay the butcher's bill this week, and they have whispered about us ever since. Bridget's month is out on Saturday. I *must* have the money to pay her. Such mean little troubles, Amber ! One almost feels degraded by them."

"My dear ! My dear ! I have seventy dollars. You can have every dollar. Why did you not tell me before?"

The two women kissed each other, crept close to each other, and Clara said :

"You have done me so much good, Amber, I will tell you now the best we can do : We have this house

until the end of September, and we must keep it up on the same footing as hitherto. You must marry before we leave it, for we must close the city house. I shall sell such of the furniture as is unsuitable for our future life, and bring the remainder to the farmhouse. As soon as you are married your father and I will remove there."

"But these changes suppose money to make them."

"I have my diamonds."

"Oh, Clara! Clara! Clara!"

"It is hard for you just now, when you naturally look for presents and more or less wedding extravagances. I never cared for diamonds; you know that."

"I hope they are in some place where Tom cannot get at them."

"They are safe. I am so sorry to make you a partner in all this trouble, Amber. I hoped Robert and you would have been married before it was necessary to make any change. You cannot tell how anxiously I have watched every day for something definite on this subject. *What is it, Molly?*"

"'Tis the half hour since the lunch-bell, ma'am, and the victuals waiting themselves cold."

Then Clara and Amber arose, making, as they did so, some trifling remark about the weather and the tennis party; and over their salad and chops both bravely discussed the small events of the petty social life around them. Amber frequently laughed, and Clara's calm face reflected her affected gayety. But the girl with the round black eyes, the long upper lip and the slit-like mouth waited on them with a sideway poise of her head, which spoke as plainly as she afterward spoke in words to Bridget in the kitchen:

"Ah, thin! They are in trouble, the both of them, and it's not Molly Carey they're desaving. Thank God!"

In the afternoon the threatened thunderstorm broke with great fury. Ambrosia was glad of it. Her own affairs were too pressing to be put out of mind, and she was well aware it was a social crime to carry anything heavier than a racket to a tennis-game. For the first time in her life she was conscious of that bosom-weight which mortals call "care." Clara's revelations had given her a mental shock. To become poor! That was a condition she had never contemplated.

She shut herself in her room and let the storm beat against her consciousness. The black, hurrying clouds, the moaning winds, the pouring rain, the unnatural gloom, the flash and the peal were a part of the strange confusion in her own life.

But a few weeks ago all had seemed as stable as existence, and she had a great longing for the days that were to come no more—days when her father had "gone to the office every morning," and Clara had always been ready to hear her plans and help her in her shopping and talk to her about her pleasures and her visiting. How could these things have passed so completely away in a few weeks? A little farm for her father and Clara! And what for herself? There was Robert Carter. But when Robert knew all, might he not suspect that she had been influenced in her acceptance of his hand by the knowledge of such approaching changes? That, at least, was not true. Poverty, until that morning, had seemed a trouble very far off.

There was an awfully majestic panorama passing

her window, but she was not in the least interested by it, except as it suited her present mood of seclusion and as it affected the return of Robert from New York. She was now very anxious to fix their wedding-day. If poverty and sorrow were coming, her strongest instinct was to fly away from them. And she found plenty of excuses for the desire. Clara wished it. She could be of no use. She would be an extra expense. She even might, as Robert's wife, be of some practical service.

"I hope Robert will get here this evening," she sighed. "I shall be unhappy now until the affair is settled."

But Nature, eternally careless of man, neither delays nor hurries her affairs for human desires or anxieties. The storm continued until midnight. Even Will did not venture through the teeming rain. And the house felt full of shadowy calamity. Clara was with her husband, who had driven home in the heat and gloom preceding the downpour and been rendered extremely nervous and exhausted by his exertions. Ambrosia could hear in the unnatural stillness his mournful regretting and Clara's calm, low voice soothing him. There was also a sound of unhappy work in the kitchen. The girls were complaining and heaving great sighs, and making each other believe that the gloom and the miserable rain were entirely country institutions, and that in New York the streets were warm and dry, and the hand-organs playing, and the policemen leaning confidentially against the area railings.

No other sounds but the wind and the rain and the rattling thunder. If she could have heard at this hour Robert's footsteps on the graveled garden-

walk or Will's voice mocking the blackbird's whistle, how glad she would have been! But there was no call for her until the dinner was served. Clara eat the silent, melancholy meal with her. Neither of them had the heart to pretend cheerfulness or to talk of frivolities. Clara said: "Your father is ill and weary." And Ambrosia looked at her step-mother with an understanding sympathy. But Molly, as she waited on them, was full of an ignorant resentment. Why should she be serving in a sorrowful house and in a place where it rained and was lonely? She tried to make her resentment felt, but failed. Clara and Ambrosia had both passed into atmospheres of realities, and the artificial accidents of their position were indifferent to them.

In the morning the storm was over and the sun shining. Life seemed more possible to every one. Ambrosia dressed with great care, and waited for her lover. He did not come until the evening, but she had promised herself to be "perfectly lovely" to him, and she kept her promise. Robert, who had feared either shrugs or pouts, was delighted to be met with a smile like sunshine.

"I was afraid you would be annoyed at my delay," he said. "You are an angel, Amber, and you look as lovely as one."

"I—missed—you—Robert!"

The four words were simple enough, but she sent them to his heart with a glance that made him tremble with pleasure. Then she put her hand in Robert's, and led him to the seat under the maple-trees. When they returned to the house there was a new tie between them. In one week Ambrosia was to be Robert's wife.

"I missed you so terribly yesterday, Robert," Ambrosia had said. "I have been niggardly to you and to my own heart long enough. I am going in the future to do everything you ask me to do."

Her little tempers and reluctances, her contradictions and fits of indifference, what were they after this confession? Only the necessary alternations to make sweet and perfect her delicious surrenders, her surprising obediences, her delightful reliances upon his wisdom and love, "I will do anything you ask me now, Robert." And he had taken her at her full word and asked for their immediate marriage.

"Because I want to go to London and Paris," he said in extenuation of his hurry. "I have medical business there, and now I could not bear to leave you, Amber. Put our separation out of the question. We can be married next Wednesday morning, and sail in the afternoon. Will you do this for me, Amber?"

She put her hand in his, but asked:

"How can I be ready in seven days. I must have dresses and things."

"Every kind of dress and 'thing' can be bought in Paris."

"My wedding-dress?"

"Why not be married in your travelling-dress? You have lots of pretty dresses."

"I cannot possibly wear a dress I have worn before."

"There are plenty of new dresses in New York. I am sure you know where to buy one."

"Yes, I think I do."

"Well then, my darling?"

"Have you thought about father?"

"I spoke to him long ago. He knows that I love you and that my great desire is to make you my wife."

"But about his health? Clara told me yesterday that he would never make any more money."

"I know."

"That he will be poor—very poor."

"We will not permit that."

"I suppose I am very poor also?"

"Do you think I care whether you are poor or rich, Amber? Do you not love me, for myself, alone?"

"As you love me, dear one!"

"Yes, truly so. Now, I am glad you spoke to me so plainly. Now, I shall always put my trust in you. Tell me the inmost thought in your heart, Amber. If it is against myself, and you tell it to me, I will be just and kind. And I will keep back no thought from you, nothing that happens me. We must be clear as the day with each other. It is the only way to be happy."

It was near midnight when Robert bid Amber "Good-night;" but everything had been arranged.

"And I am not sleepy, Clara," she said. "Come to my room, and talk to me."

So they went upstairs together and sat down by the open window. In the bright moonlight, they could see Robert slowly strolling down the country-lane to the hotel. The eyes of both women fell upon him.

"How good he is! How kind! How considerate!" said Clara.

"Yes. But it is a poor wedding! Not at all what I expected."

"We are poor people now, Amber."

"What is the use of telling me that over and over again? I say it is a poor wedding. I expected something very different."

"What did you expect?"

"I intended to have St. Azarius trimmed with palms and flowers. I expected fine music and a couple of clergymen—more especially the curate who asked me about 'love marriages.' I had chosen my bridesmaids—eight of them. To be sure, I did not like any of them but Bessie; but they were splendid 'set-offs' to each other and to myself. I had the dresses and the gifts, the bouquets and the ushers and the other details perfect. It is a little hard to give up all for a family wedding in a country church; no music, no bridesmaids, no wedding-breakfast, no wedding-dress, really."

"Robert did not seem to care."

"Robert was delighted. He said he did not see what the world had to do with our marriage, anyway. He said that 'show' marriages were intensely vulgar, and that society would make a decree to that effect very soon. He said also that it was vulgar to receive presents and make a spectacle of ourselves, and that it would be far better and happier to enter life together by that modest portal that love desires and which does not offend good fortune."

"He spoke very wisely."

"Very wisely, indeed! I asked him if he had learned what he said out of a book. And he answered he had learned out of the Book of Life."

It was natural enough that Ambrosia should have at least one little grumble over the collapse of her girlish dreams. Especially as she never again al-

luded to them. Indeed, she was so full of endearing self-disparagements and of little compunctions for her happiness, that Clara thought she had never been so lovable and so charming.

And during these last days—days so full of hopes, dreams and desires—Robert was a different Robert. Even Will was astonished at the romance, the chivalry and the magnificent generosity of his brother's love. For there is a *Don Quixote* in every *Sancho Panza*; and Robert Carter was, perhaps, for the first time in his life, at the topmost reach of his best self. The actual world was under his feet; he was living in an ideal one, full of beauty and of self-abnegations. But it is not in this life—not in this life—we are able to live long in the ideal, however good and charming it is. We are not satisfied with ideals; and, alas, for realizations! Be they ever so sweet and good, they are of the earth, earthy.



CHAPTER V.

WHEN "LOVE IS LORD OF ALL."

Count nothing won till Love be Lord of all.

* * * * *

"Domestic happiness, thou only bliss
Of Paradise that has survived the fall."

—*Cowper.*

There is in souls a sympathy with sounds;
And as the mind is pitched, the ear is pleased
With melting airs, of martial, brisk or grave;
Some chord in unison with what we hear
Is touched within us; and the heart replies.

—*Cowper.*

Perhaps it was well the interval before the marriage was so short. Every one was at an unnatural strain, and every one was somewhat relieved when the beautiful bride, amid lifted hats and smiling faces, stepped lightly from her old life to her husband's side. Robert was almost impatient of the ceremony; impatient of the train. He wished to realize his power to take Ambrosia away from every one who hitherto had had any share in her. Her brother Tom had annoyed him greatly with his effusive affection for his sister; with his busy officiousness; with his pronounced good looks. He

took a dislike to Tom which he could hardly control. He said to himself that if Will had been at all like him he should have hated his own brother. The first determination he made as a married man was that Tom Shepherd should never be a familiar in his house.

Now, however, he proposed to give himself two months of absolute holiday; to devote that time, at least, to making his young wife happy and to that process of assimilation which was to make them really one. He entered on this holiday with his usual completeness of purpose. The medical business, which had been its excuse, was soon completed, and then Ambrosia was the subject of all his thoughts and plans. Never had a young girl a more joyous entry into married life. Whatever she wished she had. Wherever she desired to go she went. Her husband was her lover; he was enraptured with her beauty and brightness; he had even a great admiration of himself for having won the love of a being so superior to the rest of the world.

And Ambrosia now really loved her husband. A young girl is not always sure of her feelings. A young wife is either supremely happy or supremely miserable. It seemed to Ambrosia that she had no wish left to gratify. Even her girlish desire to have unlimited silk and lace was remembered. However, when this trial of her self-restraint came, Robert found that Ambrosia was quite able to spend wisely and that her pretended extravagance was one of those willful hypocrisies women are not ashamed of.

In fact, he was astonished both at her prudent outlays and her still more prudent reservations. During

their courtship, Ambrosia had held in reserve the practical side of her character; but when she was a wife, Robert soon understood that she knew very well how to obtain a dollar's worth for a dollar. And he considered this ability an additional charm; for though he was a generous man, he knew that generosity was meant for great occasions and that to be generous every day and always is waste and folly.

Their headquarters were in London or Paris, and from these cities they made delightful excursions not curtailed by railway-time and not hampered by trunks and valises. Some of the glorious September days were spent among the laurels of Windermere, others in the terraced streets of Edinburgh, that—

“ Towered, templed metropolitan,
 Waited upon by hills,
River and widespread ocean, tinged
By changing light or draped and fringed
 As changeful vapor wills,
Or hanging like a Cyclop's dream,
High in the shifting weather gleam.”

Here they grew silent and confidential in their happiness, answering each other's thoughts by glances and smiles, sitting in the lonely palaces full of dreams, or, hand in hand, climbing the storied way to the gray old castle. October they linked with ancient towns and the songs of the grape-gatherers and the romances of the Mediterranean. Then, half reluctantly and half willingly, they turned their hearts and faces westward.

Both felt that the May of their love was over and that it would be folly and disappointment to prolong what had come to a legitimate conclusion. Yet there was no sorrow in this recognition. Was not the rich

summer and autumn of love before them? So, though they turned backward with a sigh, as they stepped on board the home-bound steamer, the next moment they looked forward with a smile. They began to talk of New York; to recall its crash and rattle, its multitudinous cries, its snatches of talk and laughter, its bells and clocks and chimes; all demanding, insinuating, clamoring at the ear and the heart.

They wondered about their house, and if Will had got the workmen out of it, or if they would have to camp in a hotel. And like a long-forgotten but imperative friend, Robert's work appealed to him with an irresistible authority. The thought of his laboratory was pleasant to him; his unfinished experiments assumed new points of interest. All the positive ideas of actual duty which had seemed so antagonistic to all his love-dreams blended now with the ozone in the salty air and the noise of the waves, and the breath of the great west winds blew them into his heart and brain. Every day, as he drew nearer the shore, the thought of his work was better and sweeter.

Ambrosia also had her plans of life. Young wives are all perfect housekeepers, and she had heard something from Will of the tyrannical reign under which he and Robert had been permitted to keep house. She intended to alter such conditions very quickly. Her servants must be well-bred, and her arrangements without flaw or hindrance. She had a great many people to astonish, she had some to snub, and a few whom she would delight to honor. The waves rocked her to and fro, and she lay in her steamer-chair with closed eyes, thinking of and

planning for the satisfaction of these diverse feelings.

There was a little squall on the evening of the day before they landed, and with her hand in Robert's hand, and her head against his shoulder, Ambrosia thoroughly enjoyed the tumult of the waves and the winds and the noise of the rattling sails and the hoarse cries of the sailors. After the dreary monotony of days of calm, it brought to her that quickened sense of life which is like wine.

But it was a tame sensation compared with the welcome New York shouted from all her wharves and streets. There happened to be some military display, and they landed at noon while the cannon were firing and the sharp regularity of military bands was striking fire and sympathy from the city's heart. Then they understood how much more powerfully men are affected by the noise *men* make than by any noise of nature's. The "double, double, double beat of the thundering drum" and the shouting of the captains and the cheers of the crowd stirred Ambrosia as the voice of the winds and waves never did. She said to Robert:

"I feel New York in all my veins. I breathe it. I live it. I would not give my three-score-and-ten years in it for a cycle of Europe. Would you, Robert?"

And he was still lover enough to answer:

"Not unless the cycle was surely to be spent with you."

Will had brought the carriage to meet them. He had also thought of an express wagon for their trunks. He was as happy and as excited as a boy of twelve years old might have been. It was such a great thing to be waiting for his sister. It was

such a miraculously delightful thing to have that sister lift her face to his and kiss him. He was so amazed and so happy at this favor that it made him suddenly silent. He could only clasp his brother's hand and say :

"Oh, Robert ! Robert ! Robert !"

Robert had been a little doubtful about the house, but it had been Will's business and delight to hurry forward the work. His supervision had been ceaseless and intelligent ; his taste in designing and carrying out designs marvelous. A perfectly new house could not have been in more faultless order, and a perfectly new house would have lacked that subtle *aura*, that atmosphere of kindred humanity, which clings only to houses long dwelt in by men and women of the same family. After lunch, they spent the afternoon in its examination, in admiring and suggesting and calculating.

"I know Kerry and Thomas and the rest of the kitchen autocrats are laughing at us," said Will.

"Let them laugh," answered Ambrosia. "What is that to us?" And she laughed herself—a little ringing, scornful laugh, that boded no good to the kitchen autocrats.

Afterward, Robert went to his laboratory, and looked over his unfinished work and made plans for the future. And Ambrosia slept, and lay between sleeping and waking, and finally rose and dressed herself very handsomely for her first home-dinner. And when Robert seated her at the table, then Will remembered how he had urged his brother to fall in love with Ambrosia. And now she was fulfilling all his sweet prophecy—sitting at their table, sitting at Robert's side, calling Robert and himself by their

Christian names, casting all the glamour of her presence through and through the house, so long empty of womanly influence.

The brothers had been accustomed to make no delays in eating their dinner; for in some way they had been made to feel that this was only a proper deference to the high respectability of Mr. Kerry, the butler. The soup and fish and meat had always been brought on with silent dignity, had received the immediate attention of Robert and Will, and been dismissed to the kitchen, for the proper leisurely enjoyment. Their evening talks and discussions had been generally over the dessert, or more frequently still later, when My Lady Nicotine sang to them the song of the siren.

But Ambrosia calmly abrogated these laws of the domestic Medes and Persians. She trifled with the soup until Kerry was nervous. Will had just told her of the marriage of Miss Jones to the rich rector of a fashionable church in Washington, and Ambrosia sipped and talked, and talked and sipped, until Kerry considered that only one word, "outrageous," was adequate to express the situation.

"Robert, Miss Jones has been married a month to the Rev. Jay Bank. What do you think she has found out?"

"Many things, I dare say. Your soup will get cold, and it is excellent soup. Do you not think so?"

"Pretty good. It ought to be better. I know some things Gertrude has found out; first, that the vestry-door does not close upon a being mystic, wonderful! A being of beautiful sermons and spotless neckties."

"I dare say you are mistaken, my dear. Miss—the lady, may still be infatuated."

"What I mean is that she is now familiar with him on his own hearth-rug. She has seen him cross and commonplace at his breakfast-table—eating chops and eggs and reading the New York *Herald*. She has heard him grumble over a badly cooked dinner. The vestry-door is quite a common door now. It is a pity, perhaps."

"I suppose he has a good income."

"I dare say. I remember Gertrude speaking of him as in the true Apostolic Succession. But the—the income may not be regulated by apostolic precedents."

"I should think not. Some of the clergy have large incomes."

"They ought to have. The Gospel does not keep the wolf from the door; does it, Will?"

"No, indeed! And the law has no special favors for clerical debtors."

That was the kind of talk that delayed the soup; and when Kerry brought in the fish, he said:

"I hope it is not spoiled, sir, it has been waiting so *very long*, sir."

Ambrosia seemed to enjoy it. She trifled a long time over a very small piece; for she had got as far as the probable amount of Miss Jones's fortune. Will mentioned a certain sum. Ambrosia laughed at the dimensions. Robert asserted that he had seen it in print. Ambrosia settled the matter by saying:

"Very well, Robert; but ciphers are cheap, and Gertrude used them freely when she spoke of her fortune."

The roast came on really burnt. Kerry's attitude was that of a man who feels apology to be underserved. If people would talk, burnt meat was the necessary consequence. Ambrosia said: "It must

be attended to." The words appeared simple, but the observant butler declared afterward "there was whole volumes in them." And somehow the burnt meat suggested to Will a certain grim tragedy that had occurred while Robert was away; a man had quarreled with his mates and, while they were sleeping, had set fire to the house and burnt them. Then the villagers had lynched the murderer. The story brought on a long discussion on the wisdom and authority of Judge Lynch, whom Will called the "American Lycurgus." There was often a certain antique *bon ton* in Will's comparisons, because he read the Greek and Latin classics so lovingly; and Ambrosia told him so. The compliment made Will blush with pleasure, and put him to his mettle in the matter of small-talk; so that the dinner lasted a full hour and a half. Kerry had no adjectives left by that time. He simply flung off his coat and remained speechless, a spectacle of exhaustion to his wife and comrades.

"Of course, Ambrosia was severely criticised; but she was quite indifferent to the circumstance. Her husband was talking softly to her of their love and their future; and in the next parlor Will was thrilling the air with music, whose dew-drop cobweb of harmony and glittering caprice at length touched the senses of the self-absorbed married lovers.

"What is Will playing? It is wonderful! Like the music of spirits!" said Ambrosia.

Robert rose and pushed aside the *portière*.

"Will, Will, tell us what you are playing?" he cried. "You are taking us from ourselves!"

"I played first the adorable 'Ballet of Sylphs,' from the 'Faust' of Berlioz, and after it the 'Minuet of Will-o'-the-Wisps.'"

"But I never heard such music."

"If you have never heard the music of Berlioz, then you have never heard anything which can remind you of it. He is the musician of the supernatural. Like Beddoes, he was 'tired of being merely human.'"

"And we might have heard his music in Paris?"

"Perhaps. I do not know. Listen to this setting of the 'Mephistopheles' music. Listen to its fatal monotonous progression. It is like a galloping nightmare."

"No, no!" said Ambrosia. "Play something pleasanter than that!"

"Well, then, the great love-duet between Faust and Margaret;" and, as the aching intensity and radiant pulsations filled the room, each heart swelled and beat to them. Will turned with a face fairly transfigured. "Berlioz knew what a love-duet should be like. He has written one, worthy even of Faust and Margaret."

"I always thought," said Ambrosia, softly, "that it was Gounod who wrote 'Faust?'"

"Ah, Gounod's Faust and Margaret is a very different one to the 'Faust' of Berlioz. In the 'Faust' of Berlioz, humanity breaks bounds, as it ought to do, and the other world surges into this world. Gounod's 'Faust' takes one far in a contrary direction; into a fair meadow-land of smiling commonplaces, where his melodious birds sing madrigals. If you have the heart to feel it, the 'Faust' of Berlioz is incomparably the greater."

With this fine music, their first evening of home-life closed; they were not inclined for conversation after it. They clasped hands and smiled good night, ending the happy hours, best of all, by making them happy in the time of their ending.



CHAPTER VI.

"BUT THIS IS HUMAN LIFE."

But this is human life—
The disappointment, the anxiety,
Imaginations, struggles far and nigh,
All human ; bearing in themselves this good—
That they are still the air, the subtle food,
To make us feel existence ; and to show
How quiet death is. —*Keats.*

The days slip into each other ; none of them stand by themselves. Something that we did yesterday, or something that we are to do to-morrow, invades to-day ; and thus we live in the past and in the future as well as in the present. Ambrosia could not escape this entanglement of duties and interests. She desired to give a whole day to her father and step-mother, but there was ever something to do from the past or something to prepare for the future, and a week elapsed before she felt able to leave everything and go to Mayberry. Will took her to the train, but she would not allow him to accompany her further. Her heart told her there was sorrow at home with which no stranger should intermeddle. •

It was an exquisite day, full of that languid melancholy which, at the fall of the leaf, covers nature

like a veil. The gladdest human heart shares it; the beat of the swiftest brain falters in it. It made an unconsidered "hush" even in the small manufacturing villages through which she passed. The open doors and windows of the houses let it in to the hearths of the noisiest homes. The young were quiet and inclined to sentimental reflections; the aged and the sick felt that they were but bound sheaves ready for the harvesting. Hope was not in the air nor in the heart; only wistful reverie, retrospection, resignation.

Mayberry was not at any time a cheerful place. It stood a little back from the country road, and the low meadows, the brook and the ugly pollard willows, which were its immediate features, had a lonely, unhappy look. She had taken a railroad hack at the station in order to reach it quickly, and the torn, frowsy cushions and the halting horse caused her to make some very startling comparisons. No one saw her approach. Her father was in the orchard, watching the apple-gatherers. Clara was in the dairy making butter. She went into the open house and called Clara, and then, in her company, they went into the orchard for Mr. Shepherd.

They walked silently, hand in hand, their tight clasp and their speaking eyes making words poor and unnecessary. Each knew the other's heart. Compliments and protestations would have been the emptiest of forms. Explanations and apologies were understood. Through the withered grass and the fallen leaves they went to where her father stood under the apple-trees.

It was the same gentlemanly, kindly man Ambrosia had always called "father." And yet some

inscrutable change had taken place. No one knew this better than Ambrose Shepherd himself.

"I have turned aside into this quiet place to die, my dear," he said, to his daughter; "and I am yet a young man."

What lament was in his voice! For no one accepts such a fate without infinite sadnesses and regrets.

"No, father; you have come here to prolong your life, that is all."

"But why prolong it? I am not permitted to do my work. All I planned is left unfinished."

"Cannot Tom carry out your designs?"

She knew Tom could not; but she asked the question with some vague intent of giving the dying man hope or a relief for his disappointment.

But he answered sadly:

"No man completes another's work. 'The unfinished window in Aladdin's Tower unfinished must remain.'"

She was glad to see his favorite books on the table by his chair; glad to know that there were still intervals in which he could glean comfort from them. She talked to him of her travels and adventures, of the strange sights she had seen and the strange people she had talked with; and generally he listened with a pleased and intelligent curiosity. But he soon wearied and grew restless and melancholy. In the middle of a vivid description of a Parisian opera, he said fretfully:

"I can listen no longer, Amber. Good-bye, my dear, good-bye!" then, taking Clara's arm, he went to his own room, and Ambrosia was left alone with such sad and solemn thoughts as could not be evaded nor yet deceived with false hopes.

When Clara returned, she tried, for Ambrosia's sake, to recapture the spirit of this world. She asked if they had met Bessie in Europe, and smiled sympathetically when Ambrosia answered they had not tried very hard. They wanted to be alone. It was so much nicer. She insisted on discussing all the whims and frivolities of Vanity Fair. Ambrosia's new dresses, her house, the parties she intended to give; even her small animosities and her contemplated social triumphs. And, as they talked, Clara spread the table and fried a chicken and made the chocolate Ambrosia loved.

"I have but one servant," she said, as she placed the food on the table, "and she is among the apples. Then, it is so pleasant to do anything for you, Amber."

"But not this kind of work, Clara. I cannot bear to see it."

"I was born on a poorer farm than Mayberry. I cooked and made butter and swept and dusted until I came to you. As long as he was able, your father gave me everything a woman could desire. I took him for better or worse. Poor Ambrose! His is the hardest lot. For he loves life, and yet he knows that he must die. Have you seen Tom since you returned?"

"He called last Sunday. I do not think Robert likes Tom. He has said nothing to that effect, but I could not help feeling it. How is Tom doing as regards father's business?"

"He was here once since you were married. He told me in the rudest manner that there was no business. He said his father had left everything in confusion, and talked about—saving your father's

good name. I did not let Ambrose see him. It is a cruel situation. I wrote last week to your father's lawyer."

"Have you any money, Clara?"

"Very little. The farm was partially to stock. We were deceived in that matter. And tools were taken away and had to be replaced. And the results of farming come in so far apart and in such pitiful sums—a few dollars for butter and eggs now and then ; that is all yet. Next year we shall have the crops."

"I have fifty dollars with me, and you must take them, dear."

"Certainly not, Amber. The money is your husband's money. It would be a kind of theft in both of us."

"I am sure Robert would like me to leave it."

"Do nothing and give nothing without his approval. After money is given, it is too late to ask him."

"I shall not ask Robert about every cent I spend."

"If you give money away you must ask him. I do not fear poverty, if I can keep out of debt. But oh, Amber, there are no wolves like those debt sends around a house! Do you remember that play in which the hero uses his arm as a bolt to keep out the long-fanged, ever-increasing pack of wolves, who were ready to tear the house down. It made my heart ache with the old terror. For I remember when my father was putting his life against our door to keep out the wolves of debt. Your father saved him and my mother ; and they still live on the farm that Ambrose Shepherd rescued. If the worst should come, we can go there and be most welcome. I wish

you would send for Tom to your house. Find out what he is doing and how he is living. See if there is any hope of him settling his father's affairs. If not, tell me truly. I shall then be able to estimate the best and the worst—perhaps Robert will help you in these inquiries.”

“I should not like to trouble Robert about Tom. He dislikes him. Perhaps he knows something about Tom that we do not know. I never saw him so coldly polite to any one as he is to Tom. I have almost quarreled with him on this subject.”

“If such is the case, do not move in any inquiry about Tom without Robert's knowledge. Tom's love for any human creature is not worth much. He is so absorbed in himself as to be devoid and stripped of common politeness.”

“He was very polite to Robert, in spite of Robert's coldness.”

“If Tom yielded an inch, it was only to get his own way. Perhaps you had better have nothing to do with him. There are some things a wife is bound to honor her husband's feelings in, without dispute; and one of these is certainly to ask nobody across his threshold who is disagreeable to him.”

After this the conversation was depressed and broken. Clara was frequently called away, and the sense of homely duties and working garments was unpleasant to Amber. She had visited several old farm-houses in England, and been charmed with their great kitchens scented with all kinds of herbs—their sanded floors—their ivory-like deal furniture—their comely women—bare-armed and trigly shod, busy among the cheese and curds; and she had felt the antique charm, the Homeric simplicity

of such a life. But this painted wood house, with its carpeted sitting-room and its sense of loneliness and uncongenial labor, was a mournful incongruity. There was no air of prosperity about it; no lowing cattle and busy servants; none of the stir and bustle of production of any kind.

She was glad to get back into the living world, and oh, so glad to enter once more the handsome portal of her own home! It was full of warmth and light, and a large basket of fresh flowers filled it with the scent of summer. She longed to fling from her consciousness all the day's unhappy influences. It seemed good to wash away the very dust of its weary hours; to put out of sight the plain, tweed travelling-suit associated with it; to robe herself in rose colors; to put gems upon her hands and flowers at her bosom and the rich perfume of Persia on her garments.

She would not let Robert question her at dinner; she determined to save the sad recital for their hours of sacred personal confidences. And Robert was only too glad to humor so pleasant a mood. He proposed a visit to the theatre, and he was only half-satisfied when Amber said she had not dressed for the theatre but for his special gratification. For after a man is married he is not averse to showing off the beauty of his wife, and to feeling the envy of the men he knows a little addition to his own good fortune.

He took her on his arm with admiring glances, and as they were entering the dining-room Will joined them. He was flushed and excited and eager to chatter. He had been at a great meeting of very good people, who had met to consider what methods

were to be taken to provide the workingman and the workingwoman with refined amusements.

"As if any of you understood the workingman or the workingwoman," said Ambrosia, scornfully. "I once took a class of girls out of Third Avenue stores. I soon began to smile at my own ignorance. I found out that these girls considered society girls as decidedly behind the time—as wanting chic and style. They criticised our way of dressing and our manners, and laughed at our patronage. You should have seen them mimic Miss Jones. I know, Will, for I got at the heart of one of them. I invited her to a party, and she was the toniest girl in the room."

"The working-class can take very good care of themselves," added the doctor. "If people would not try to 'elevate' them, if they could not be 'got at,' I am sure it would be an advantage. Every generation has its standing moral patient. It used to be the noble savage or the negro. Now philanthropists are walking the working-classes just as a young doctor walks the hospitals."

"We are trying, Robert, to find out how much good there is in every soul, and to judge men from their own standpoint, not from ours. I think that is a great movement."

"'Movement!' 'Movement!' We have had the Tract Movement and the Abolition Movement and the Temperance Movement, and now it is the Workingman's Movement."

"The good such 'movements' do is simply incalculable. I can assure you of that, Robert."

"Certainly, Will. There must be much honest sincerity mixed with the cant and self-delusion they

invite. You are honest, for instance. And there must be many like you. You gain nothing, and you give a great deal. That is a good test."

"The poor have to work so hard."

"There you are decidedly wrong, Will. The poor learn from their infancy a lesson our men of brains and commerce never learn—that is *to take their work easily*. Do you ever see a workingman in a hurry? Are they ever anxious to finish a certain amount? Do they lay one brick beyond their tale of time? Do they ever *put themselves* into their task?"

"They are not paid for such vital labor."

"Are stockbrokers and editors and merchants paid for it? Can a man be paid for his life? Not unless he gives it away."

"Then the workingman is a sensible man not to encroach on his reserve vital power."

"I do not say but that he is. I only say that you are busy teaching your grandmother in agitating the question of his relief in this direction. Amber, do you recollect that party of jolly ditchers we came upon suddenly at the foot of Helvellyn?"

"Very well. I remember also the answer one of them gave you about their easy way of taking life and labor. You know it was in rhyme, Robert."

"An old rhyme, hundreds of years old, and yet it spoke for the laborer of to-day, as it doubtless spoke for his brother in feudal times. Can you repeat it, Amber?"

"I am sure I can. You see, Will, Robert asked them if their work was not very hard, and an old man, with a rosy face and the merriest blue eyes, answered:

"'Nay, not it, master. We get through the week pretty handily, for thou sees—

" 'Monday is Sunday's brother,
And Tuesday is such another ;
On Wednesday we stop a bit to pray,
And Thursday is half holiday ;
On Friday it is too late to hurry and strain,
And Saturday is half-holiday again.' "

"Very good for the foot of Helvellyn," answered Will ; "but the 'bosses' of New York would soon take all the truth out of the old rhyme."

"Come, Amber," said Robert, "let us drop the workingman and get away to the opera for an hour or two. To-morrow I must begin to 'hurry and strain ;' so let us take half-holiday to-night."

Amber rose with pleased alacrity, and in a short time they were feeling in all its sharp intensity that sense of life and brotherhood which music and the atmosphere of living, crowding humanity create. They entered during a slight interval, and there was a conscious recognition of the doctor and his beautiful bride. Will's happy face beamed salutations.

Amber sat between Robert and Will, her hand upon Robert's hand, her form slightly bending toward him as if drawn by the attraction of his personality. Suddenly she felt his hand tremble, and, glancing upward, she caught the direction of his angry eyes and followed their glance.

In a box nearly opposite, Tom Shepherd was making himself conspicuous. The effort was hardly required, for the woman with him was sufficiently remarkable. Undoubtedly she was a great beauty of a certain type. Her hair was golden in hue ; her cheeks held the loveliest tints of white and rose ;



"ROBERT, I CANNOT REFUSE TO SEE MY BROTHER."—See Chapter VI.

her eyes were large, rolling and intensely black ; her form superbly lavish, and she wore large and many diamonds of the purest water. Robert's and Ambrosia's eyes fell on her at the same moment, and then they involuntarily looked at each other.

"Tom is coming here," said the doctor, in a hurried whisper ; "and it will not do. Sit still with Will. I will go to meet him."

"Robert, I cannot refuse to see my brother."

"But not here ;" and with an intelligent glance he gave Ambrosia into Will's charge and left the box.

In about ten minutes he returned, white and silent. The joy of the evening was over ; and before the opera was finished, Amber asked if he would not wish to go home. Robert gladly agreed to the proposal. Silence and gloom, apparently without adequate cause, had taken the place of that gay abandon to the pleasure of the moment which is the first condition of enjoyment. Only Will made any attempt to talk.

"We ought to be taught how to amuse ourselves," he said with a little derisive shrug. "In the middle of an opera we do not know how to be happy. Nearly all who went to hear Verdi to-night had arranged the affair with careful calculation, and were conscientiously trying to enjoy themselves. But, did they do so? No! No! The men were all business-like in their dress-coats, and to go to the opera with their wives and sweethearts must be really a splendid waste of their energy."

Ambrosia did not reply. Robert's answer was without interest, and Will perceived that he was the "third" that is often so unwelcome. He took no offense. His organ was ready to converse with him

at any time, and in a few minutes he was beautifully interweaving on it musical chains of harmony.

Ambrosia had taken off her shining cloak, and she was now folding it with some deliberation across the back of her chair. Robert watched her movements. He was admiring her grace and beauty but not feeling any impulse to express his admiration. Other emotions were eager to explain themselves, but it was Ambrosia who invited a discussion of them. She turned to Robert, full of the purpose, and asked:

"What did my brother Tom say to you?"

"He wished to come to our box and speak to you. I said he could not do so. I regretted it, but could not possibly consent—under the circumstances."

"But why not? Tom is my brother, and I am very fond of him."

"Did you see the woman who was with him? To have permitted Tom, in the sight of the whole house, to come from her side to your side would have been to offer you a great insult. She must have dared Tom to make the attempt. It is like her."

"Oh! You know her, then?"

"I have heard of her."

"Tom is my brother."

"It is difficult to believe it."

"I love Tom."

"Are we to quarrel about Tom Shepherd?"

"Tom is my brother. Not to receive Tom publicly is to give the world permission to say: 'Doctor Carter married Ambrosia Shepherd, but he will not acknowledge her family.'"

"You know that is not true."

"But it seems true. Father and Clara cannot trouble you. Tom is the only member of my family

you have any opportunity to be familiar with, and you always do your best to insult him."

"How has Tom Shepherd treated your father and his wife?"

"You are not called upon to take up father's quarrel. I say that before the world you ought to treat Tom as your brother-in-law."

"Amber, my dear wife, in this matter you must take my word. You must trust me."

She turned away, lifted her cloak, and went silently out of the room. Robert saw that she was deeply offended. She declined afterward to discuss the subject. She said only: "Tom is my brother." This was Ambrosia's method of dealing with any unpleasant question; first to make a strong assertion and then afterward to preserve a provoking silence. She had seldom found these tactics to fail; for men in an especial manner dislike to oppose, where there is not even an apparent resistance. Still Robert discovered that night that a silent woman can be a thousand times more aggravating than a disputatious one. For there is some hope of influencing a woman who will talk, but one who is perversely dumb is likely to be perversely deaf, also.

In the morning she was in the same provoking mood. She would talk on any subject but the one Robert felt to be so keenly urgent. If he uttered Tom's name, she was engaged or she did not hear; or, if compelled to listen, answered with an untranslatable shrug. The mail brought her several letters. Robert was sure one of them was from Tom; and he looked anxiously at Ambrosia as she examined the envelopes and then laid it aside. But he would not ask: "Is that letter from Tom?" And

Ambrosia said nothing on the subject. So Robert left her that morning with a cold and resentful "good-bye." And she did not perceive that something had happened which never should have happened; and that she had sown an evil seed of suspicion in her husband's heart.

Yet she was troubled and unhappy enough, and Tom's letter did not make her less so. He had evidently written it in haste from the hotel at which he supped; and it was so untidy as to give the impression either of great anger or of the absence of all respect for his sister's position.

"DEAR SIS: Your husband has just told me that I am not to call upon you. What does he mean? Did I not love you long before he did? Are you going to deny your own flesh and blood for him? I hope not, sis. You know that if I love anybody in the world, it is you. If I cannot come to your fine house, I suppose you can come to Maillard's? I shall be there for lunch at one o'clock to-morrow. I expect to see you, and you must not disappoint me.

"Your loving brother,

TOM."



CHAPTER VII.

A VISIT AND A QUARREL.

Come away! Break through all delays! Woman is
A fickle and changeful thing. — *Virgil.*

To willful men
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters. — *Shakespeare.*

At the same hour Mr. Madison and his daughter Bessie were taking breakfast together. Mr. Madison had delayed this meal much beyond his usual hour in order to give himself the pleasure of Bessie's society; for she had just returned from her European trip, and her presence was very charming to him. Also he had something important to say, and he wished to secure her sympathy in his own plans before she had time to make others which would interfere with them.

It was Bessie a little more sun-browned, a little more womanly, a little more self-reliant and self-appreciative, that came into the room, with her head well up and her pretty form the center of a wonderful combination of floating pale-pink cashmere and silk, lace and rosettes of ribbon.

"Is it not pretty?" she asked, as her father kissed

and then held her off at arms' length to admire. "I expect Cousin Amber this morning, and you know how airish brides always are, father. But in this gown I shall feel equal to Mrs. Dr. Carter."

"You look—*stunning!* I know no other word, Bessie."

"That word will do, father." And she seated herself carefully, letting her drapery fall into its proper curves and folds, and slightly drawing upward the sleeves, in order to shield their elaborate lace trimmings. "Yes, I wrote to Amber yesterday. I told her I had a cold and a troublesome cough, and you see how badly I am sunburnt. It will take at least four days' attention to make my face presentable. So I wrote for Amber. I want to see how she looks—and acts. Marriage always changes people so much. But she will not put on married graces to me, I think. I shall only laugh at them."

"I hope you will not quarrel."

"Human nature is fallible; but, as a rule, girls do not eat girls."

"We are all fallible."

"Except the New York *Herald*. I like the *Herald* just because it is so sure of its own infallibility—so sure it knows everything about everything. I intend to cultivate the same conviction. It must be lovely to feel positive that one is always right and always must be right, and that every one who doubts our always being right is either a very silly or a very disreputable person."

Mr. Madison fluttered his *Herald* and laughed. He could not help regarding his little girl with an intense amusement and enjoyment. She was so imposing in her fineries, she seemed to be everybody

in the room, to demand so much attention, to fill up so much mental space, that he said :

"You are so light and sweet and so apparently important, Bessie, that you remind me of nothing so much as whipped cream. There is not really a great deal of you and yet, somehow, you fill the room. I feel as if I were nobody at all."

"That is because you are dressed in a yard or two of gray tweed. If you had velvet breeches on and a plush coat, lined with satin and laces at your fingers and diamonds on your toes, you would feel very imposing."

"I should feel like a fool or a flunkey."

"But is not whipped cream nice? A great many persons prefer it to roast-beef. And though it does take up a deal of room it has its individuality. If you were to compress it in any way, then it would cease to be whipped cream. Would you like me reduced to an essence, father? Essence of Bessie Madison?"

"No, no, Bessie! I like you just as you are."

"I like you, too, just as you are—with the prospect of the changes you will be sure to make this winter. For you will have to go out with me, and we shall entertain at home; and as you will be expected to dance and take ladies in to supper and that kind of thing, you will require dress-suits. How handsome you will look! I was thinking you might refurnish the drawing-rooms and the large dining-room and the small reception-room and a guest-chamber or two. I heard yesterday that Doctor Carter has made his house a perfect paradise."

"'Paradise!'"

"Not a Bible one, of course; a kind of Turkish

one, represented by gorgeous carpets and curtains and cushions and all kinds of luxuries. I have to try and fancy Ambrosia in the midst of this splendor. Madame Savary was here yesterday, and she says Mr. Will Carter stayed in New York all summer, directing a small army of Italian decorators."

"*Pshaw!* I do not credit more than a hundredth part of such stories. Are you intending to rival your cousin's house and dress?"

"*'Rival!'* You should not say such plain words, father. I have always had finer rooms and finer clothes than Cousin Amber, and it is not in the nature of an American girl to fall behind, even in carpets and curtain goods. Now is it? But '*rivalry*' is an ugly word; and commits you to so many unpleasant things."

"Besides, you are younger than Ambrosia."

"Which thing is in my favor; every day is a gain in New York."

"And then you are only an unallied, unattached person. Amber is married to a very prominent—I may say, famous man."

"And I may marry a Presidential candidate? Who can tell? Or perhaps even an editor on one of the great dailies or a popular preacher or a famous tenor or a prince or even a mayor of New York!"

"Did you see no one in Europe you would like to marry?"

"No one."

"You are heart-free, Bessie?"

"I love no one half so well as I love you, father."

"Then, Bessie, I will tell you something I desire very much. If you feel that you can give my desires a chance, I shall be very much pleased with

you. But I would not coerce you in the matter of marriage. You must satisfy your own heart in an affair so bound up with joy and sorrow as marriage is. I want you to go to Texas this winter."

"But why to Texas? Are you going also?"

"I wish you to visit your uncle, Colonel Sam Madison, and your cousins, Lulu and James and Alphonse."

"I never heard of such people. And think of all my lovely dresses!"

"You can take all the 'lovely dresses' with you. You will need them. Your uncle lives in good style, and you will visit both in Austin and San Antonio."

"Father, speak to me plainly. I see you have some object in view. Are you going to send me 'on approval' for Cousins James and Alphonse to look at?"

"It is just the other way. You know that I am a Texan by birth."

"I never even dreamed of such a thing; if I had I should have laughed at the dream when I awoke."

"I was born in Texas. My father was born there, and my grandfather and father fought with General Houston for the freedom of the state. In reward for their services they received a noble grant of land; thousands and thousands of acres, rolling back from the Colorado in incomparable pasturage and woods and farm-land. My grandfather built a fine mansion on one of the highest points—a mansion whose central hall is wide enough to turn a carriage in. It has many lofty rooms and is surrounded by piazzas raised on fluted pillars to the topmost story. The whole house is covered with flowering vines, and it is really an ideal home. I have been

thirty years away from it, Bessie, but I can yet see its large rooms and feel the gulf-breeze blowing through them."

"Why have you never gone back to this—home?"

"Thirty years ago, when the War broke out, I was in the North at college, and my opinions and desires were in direct opposition to my father's. We wrote hard words to each other. I was forbidden to ever return home, and I was young and foolish enough to accept the decree of banishment without appeal. Then I married, and became so interested—so bound up—in my present business, that I never could find time to put my frequent resolves to go and see my parents into a practical shape. Mother died and then father died, and I found that I had been altogether omitted from his will. I was too proud and too busy to protest. I permitted my younger brother Sam to take possession and to keep possession. It is eighteen years since. I have heard nothing from the old home until this summer."

"And when I was away, they came here, I suppose?"

"No, I had a letter from my brother. He says the place is mortgaged beyond his power to redeem. And yet the mortgage is but a trifle in comparison with the value of the estate. He asks me to buy the place or to lend him the money to pay the mortgage. He told me about his life and his family, and said some words about his brotherly feeling for me that made me feel very kindly."

"You see he wanted money. He never thought 'brotherly' of you until he did."

"Never mind what caused the feeling. You know

the Prodigal never thought of his father until he was hungry. I wrote to him and made a proposal, which yesterday he gladly accepted. It was, however, conditional upon your feelings."

"But I was not consulted. What have I to do with the proposal, father?"

"I proposed that you pay them a visit, and that if you happened—mind, it is entirely in your own hands—that if you happened to fall in love with either your cousin James or Alphonse, and marry him, that then I would lift the mortgage—on condition that the house and one-half of the estate are settled on you and on your children. You see, Bessie, I have been perfectly frank with you. I might have made up some plausible excuse and taken you there, and then forbidden you to fall in love with either of your cousins. *That* would have been sufficient to make you determine to marry one or the other, and thus you would have unknowingly carried out my desire. But I thought this was a mean, childish way of treating you. I resolved to tell you the truth, and ask you to carry out my plan, if it was pleasant to you."

"You did the best thing, after all, father."

"Of course. And, at any rate, you can go and see how things really are. A winter in the South will confirm your health, and you will gain and not lose by delaying your *début* into New York society. Will you go to Texas, then, my dear?"

"Are you, going, father?"

"I certainly intended to go; and then, yesterday, my manager asked me for a two- or three-week vacation. Both of us cannot be away at the same time. It would be ruinous to the business."

"And your manager's desires are of more importance than your own or even mine? If I were a man, I should 'hire a master' and make myself comfortable as a servant!"

"The poor fellow has never asked for a vacation before. He has been with me seven years. How would you have liked to say 'No' to his first request?"

"I could say it very sweetly. I should be 'so sorry,' and tell him he could have a little longer at some other time."

"But he is going with a friend or something particular like that. He seemed anxious, and I could not refuse him."

"We could wait until he comes home. If you were with me, I think I should like to go to Texas very well."

"There is no time to lose, dear Bessie."

"But I cannot travel alone."

"No, indeed! Mrs. Gonzales will be delighted to have your company. She is going to Galveston. Your uncle will meet you there."

"O-h-h-h!"

"Will you go, Bessie?"

"I will think about it, father."

"And tell me to-night?"

"Yes. I can surely make up my mind before seven o'clock, if I try very hard."

"Then good morning. Would you like to go to see W—— to-night? They say he is very funny."

"No, indeed. I saw him once. I cannot imagine how he has become so popular with New Yorkers."

"His nonsense suits their nonsense. That is the reason. Good-bye, dear little girl. Do just what

ever you desire in the matter. Think of no one but yourself."

She nodded a few times rapidly in reply, and then sat down to think. But circumstances were against her. Some trunks came from the custom-house, and it was necessary to unpack their contents as soon as possible, and before this was finished Ambrosia called. She apologized for the unfashionable hour, but she had an engagement at one o'clock of great importance, and she unconsciously threw into her manner just that air of superior aims and occupations which Bessie had anticipated.

It was almost impossible to avoid it. Ambrosia had no longer any sympathy with Bessie's prattle about her dresses and her admirers, the novel she was reading, her little squabbles with her visiting teachers or her European experiences. She was sure she knew about everything Bessie had to say, and she rather expected to be reproached for willfully missing Bessie's party three times while they were both in Europe.

So she assumed a very busy air, and she asked no questions at all. She had lost also her girlish appetite for creams and chocolates, so that Bessie could find nothing to tempt her with. She was altogether a different Ambrosia. The very trigness of her dress was a tacit disapproval of Bessie's flowing, lacy, fringy, ribbony garment. And Ambrosia praised it with such faint approval, that Bessie had no heart to exhibit her other changes of raiment. She had a sudden conviction that Mrs. Carter's purchases were both richer and in better taste. There was an opera-cloak in her trunk, which she had bought specially for Ambrosia, and she did not even offer it to her.

She was, indeed, quite abashed by her cousin's tone, and her assumption of being so overcrowded with social engagements.

"We intend to give six grand dinners this season, Bessie," she said, "and I shall have a ball, or perhaps two, for you specially. I do wish Will Carter to know you so much. Will is lovely. I am sure I should be delighted if he fell in love with you."

"Thanks!" answered Bessie with a laugh. "You said positively you would not marry until I got back from Europe. Who took my place as chief bride-maid? I have heard nothing of the ceremony. Was it at St. Azarius?"

"I wanted to wait for you, but Doctor Carter was neither to coax nor to reason with. He hardly gave me time to get a wedding-dress. As for bridemaids, I really had none. It was a simple country wedding. After all, I think show weddings are intensely vulgar. The doctor says they are. Nobody really cares about a wedding, that is, no one outside of the bride's or bridegroom's family."

"I thought you knew more than that, Amber. Why, a person's wedding is the only thing that is interesting about one. We may be born and christened and confirmed, and even die, and the world is not in the least interested with our proceedings. But just let two people conclude to get married, and immediately they become of importance. You know what kind of a catechism begins between every one who has ever heard their names. Is the bride pretty? How does she do her hair? Who are his people? Is he very fond of her? What in the world can she see in him? What in the world can he see in her? I think every marriage is a kind of fresh joy and

wonder. Did you have a great many wedding presents?"

"We were married in such a hurry, Bessie, no one had time to think of presents. Will Carter gave me a set of Worcester china and Doctor Carter some superb diamonds; but, after all, I think wedding-presents are dreadfully out of taste. They remind you of a Scotch penny wedding. I think people ought to be allowed to marry in peace."

"I want everybody in the block to know when I am going to be married. I shall enjoy watching the nursemaids and the grocer's and butcher's boys staring at the house. I want all the neighborhood to be waiting and gazing as I leave the house. I hope there will be a great crowd round the gates of Grace Church. And I intend to have the largest number allowable of bridesmaids. They get so much delight out of a wedding. Even after it is over they like to talk about the affair, and tell each other how the bride looked, and how her husband adored her, and how her travelling-dress fitted. Indeed I am in favor of show weddings, Amber."

"Well, if you like to be stared at—all right."

"Yes, I like to be stared at; and even read about. I think every real woman likes to read about a wedding. We all feel a certain joy in a man—even if we do not know him—who repents and gets married. So, you see, I do not approve of your quiet country marriage, at all. And you are so good-natured, I must believe that it was the doctor's wish and not yours."

"It is no use discussing what is past and over. But I must say after I had seen the presents at a Scotch penny wedding, I was comforted. The num-

ber of tin candlesticks made me think of Lizzie Ward's fifteen silver candelabra; and the lots of pewter and wooden spoons, of Elsie Long's sixteen dozen silver ones. It was the same principle, carried out in different materials. Did it rain all the time you were in Scotland?"

"No. It was beautiful weather—changeable, rather."

"Changeable, yes; it changes from one unpleasant variety to another, continually. In England, now, the weather is lovely."

"We were there in July. They raise an English summer in hot-houses—like grapes. It is a fact."

"Bessie, I would not say such disagreeable things; for, after all, England is a kind of relation to our native land."

"One cannot help grumbling a little about English weather. Climate in New York is arranged in such a satisfactory manner. I declare, all seasons are comfortable here. You can get roses any day in the year. It is only florists and a few market-gardeners who have to struggle against the course of nature. Society is all right."

"The first ball I give will be for you, Bessie, dear. What kind of floral decorations would you prefer?"

"Thanks, Amber, dear. You are tremendously kind; but I am going to Texas to spend the winter."

"To Texas! Why not go to the equator?"

"It is too far south."

"You are joking!"

"But why?"

"But why Texas?"

"My uncle, Colonel Sam Madison, wishes me to visit him. And father thinks it will be real good for

me. I have a slight cough, and father worries himself about it."

"I never heard you had an uncle in Texas. You never said a word about him before."

"Nor about my cousins, Louisa, James and Alphonse?"

"Never one word."

"Still I am going to visit them. Father was born in Texas."

"You amaze me. But, then, life is only a series of surprises."

"And *that* is just what makes it worth the living."

"I am so sorry to have to miss you this winter, Bessie. I have thought of you so often as the very sweetest flower in my drawing-rooms."

"Dear Amber, you are very kind. But, honestly, I am going to Texas."

"Well, Bessie, we must have a good old-time talk before you leave. Let me know when you are at liberty. I must go now. I have barely time to keep an engagement at one. It is with Brother Tom. I think, Bessie, you could have made a real good man of poor Tom; but you never would give him the least encouragement, Poor Tom!"

"Is he bad now? I mean, is he not as good as he is bonnie, to ask a question Scotch fashion?"

"I am afraid not, Bessie. If you only would have been a guide—a hope—a—"

"I could not, Amber. I really could not. Where you fail, with all your tact and influence, I should be sure to blunder. You ought to try with Tom Mrs. Oliphant's plan with her bad heroes."

"What is that?"

"She just takes them to Scotland and makes them.

by the merest accident, drop into a Free Kirk. They go home, I assure you, all of them, clothed and in their right mind."

"Are you in earnest about anything this morning, Bessie? I really do not credit a word of this Texas scheme."

"Scheme! Oh, well, you will see."

"Good-bye. Come and see me soon."

"Good-bye. I am going to Texas."

They parted with a laugh, but both girls were at high tension, and they hardly knew why or wherefore. The fact was, Ambrosia had called upon her cousin brimful of the intention to make Bessie understand that relationships between them had undergone some changes. She had gone, intending to be the married dame, the idolized wife, the leader of her social set. And Bessie, anticipating this intention, was on the defensive during the visit from first to last. So that the very atmosphere between them had been fully charged with polite antagonism; so much so that Bessie gave way to her anger as soon as Ambrosia's carriage was out of sight.

"Whether Amber knew it or not, she was impertinent," she reflected. "I felt it. And, to spite her, I said I was going to Texas. I shall have to keep my word now. For Amber will go about to tell it, here, there and everywhere. I do not care much. It will please father; and I think it will be nicer to please him than to be 'the sweetest flower in Mrs. Dr. Carter's drawing-rooms.' What insufferable airs and graces she did put on! I *do* hope, when I get married, I may have sense enough to behave decently. Well, I am going to Texas. That is settled. When I come back, we shall see what we shall see."

Ambrosia's reflections were in no pleasanter strain.

"Bessie is quite changed," she thought. "If Bessie cannot patronize, she is simply hateful. Thank goodness, I am now out of the horizon of her condescensions! I think she felt it. I think I made her realize that Mrs. Dr. Carter was not a person—"

Then the carriage stopped. She was at Maillard's, and Tom was loitering about the door, waiting for her. It had the air of an assignation, and it annoyed her. She did not speak until they had seated themselves and Tom had given the order for their lunch. Then she turned to him with as much temper as the surroundings permitted:

"Tom, I think it is real unkind of you to send for me here!"

"That prig, Doctor Carter—"

"Stop! I will not listen a moment to you if you dare to take that tone! I came to see you about father and Clara. Why do you not attend better to their wants? What has become of father's business?"

"It has gone to the dogs."

"What do you mean by 'dogs?' Yourself?"

"I mean there was no business."

"That is nonsense. Father made a fine living out of it for many years."

"It was played out when he was, and—"

"It is a shame to speak of father in such a way!"

"I can tell you, I have had to make great sacrifices to pay father's debts and keep his good name."

"You are not speaking the truth, Tom, and you know it!"

"I say that I have spent all I had, and am now in great straits myself. I think it is your duty to help

me. I tried to keep all right, mostly for your sake. I want a thousand dollars now in the worst way."

"If I had a million dollars I would not give you one cent until you did your duty to father. Even if you had no money to pay him, you ought to have visited him and explained things to him."

"I might as well have explained things to a new-born baby."

"Come, sir, your own race is not run yet. Father was a finer man than you are, one year ago!"

"Are you going to lend me some money, sis?"

"Not a cent!"

"What did you come here for, then?"

"To tell you so."

"Then I shall write to your husband for it. It is not fair; I have everything to do. He ought, for your sake, to assist me in clearing up father's business and honor."

"My husband will not give you a cent, if I can prevent it! For father's honor needs no clearing up. His name has no discredit but the fact that you bear it. Poor father, so good as he always was to you, Tom! From the day you were eight years old and begged a pony from him, I never knew him to deny you any reasonable request. He is dying. You give him nothing from all his brain has earned; you never go to see him!"

"That woman will not let me see him. She has her reasons, of course."

"Mrs. Shepherd has never an ill reason for anything she does. And do not call her 'that woman' to me again, if you please."

"Amber, there is no use in our quarreling. Eat your lunch. What can you do to help me?"



"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I have no money. Mrs. Shepherd sold her diamonds to pay my wedding expenses."

"Is not your husband's money your money also?"

"Not to give away without his permission."

"You are a bond-slave, then. I would not be any man's wife without a dollar to spend as I liked."

"I may not like to give you money. In fact, I do not like to give it to you until you drop all such acquaintances as you now spend father's and your own money on. And I have come here to tell you I will not speak to you again unless you begin at once to do right to father."

"Come, Amber, dear girl, do not get into a passion. That does no good. Lend me fifty dollars."

"I have not fifty dollars to lend."

"Bring it to me to-morrow—here, at one o'clock."

"I will never meet you here or anywhere else clandestinely again. I am ashamed of myself for being here to-day. As to lending you fifty dollars, it is out of all consideration. Surely, if Doctor Carter helps my dear father, it is enough. I will not take a cent of his money for your extravagances. Now that is the plain truth, Tom. I am going home now. And do not write to me. I will not run the risk of angering my husband and making misery for us both. You ought not to be so selfish as to desire it."

"Of course not. Your own brother is nobody now. And how you used to pretend to love him!"

"I did love you while you behaved yourself—while you were kind and respectful to father. When you give up your bad companions and do your best to make father's last days easy, I will love you again."

Then both I and Doctor Carter will be glad to see you at our house. Thanks; I want nothing more. I am going home."

"Is that all you have to say to a brother so hard up he does not know which way to turn?"

"I have heard that you bought diamonds for 'that woman' you were at the opera with. Ask her to sell them for you, as Mrs. Shepherd sold hers for me and for your father."

"You are a heartless creature, Amber! I always knew you were."

"Why did you send for me, then?" and with the inquiry she rose from the half-finished lunch and went to her carriage.

Tom followed. She said "good-bye" as he closed the door, but Tom lifted his hat without a word; and with a face black with anger and disappointment, walked rapidly up Broadway.

And neither of them saw Doctor Carter standing at the entrance to the Fifth Avenue Hotel. He was talking with two gentlemen, and as he listened to their conversation his eyes were fixed upon his wife and the young man who left her so full of evident disappointment.

"It is well I know who the handsome scamp is," he thought, "or I should have a heart-burning—and Amber had evidently not pleased him. I wonder if she will tell me; I wonder, if I asked her, if she would deny meeting him."

He speculated on this question all afternoon, not reflecting that it is often a great wrong and cruelty to tempt a loving woman to betray what love would hide for love's own sake.

There was no trace of the day's annoyances on

Amber's countenance when he returned home for dinner. She was smiling and charming, and chatting merrily with "Brother Will." She was hurt at Bessie, and she could not define her hurt, so it gave her satisfaction to recur again and again to the subject.

"She was so queer, Robert; you cannot tell how singularly unlike herself she was. She says, too, that she is going to Texas, which I only half credit. She opposed everything I said about the places we had both been to this summer; yes, you may know how contradictory she was when she declared that the Scotch climate was delightful, and that it did not rain there."

"Her experiences in Scotland seem to have been unique. Had she any other like them?"

"She said the Scotch were the most religious people in the world. You would have thought she had never seen any religion in America."

"Well," answered the doctor, "no other people in the world have made such a noise about their religion as the Scotch."

"And then their industry!"

Will laughed heartily.

"In Scotland they have to be industrious," he said. "There it is work hard or die. But will you kindly observe the canny Scot when he has emigrated himself to the wealthy State of New York. I happen to know several. They are all of them pottering about gentlemen's gardens, tying up flowers, snipping off dead leaves and tap, tap, tapping on a sunny wall with a half-ounce hammer. The Scot may be industrious in Scotland, but when he goes from his native land it is not to work—if you please."

But it was neither in the power of Ambrosia or Will to quite dispel that "something" in the atmosphere which chilled all their efforts, and after awhile they seemed to weary of them. Will had become exceedingly sensitive to any influence which made him in the way of marital confidence. He said he "had to go to a meeting;" and Ambrosia's rather forced chaffing about the affair did not bring the diverse elements any closer together.

"You show such an ample stretch of starched linen to-night, Will. Are you going to speak?" she asked.

"Perhaps I may, Amber. A Christian young man has so many duties now, if he only looks for them."

"Yes; and when their associations wear such lovely linen and beautiful patent-leather slippers, who would not be a Christian young man? Religion, certainly in this day, was never designed to make them less—fashionable."

"Or less conscientious or less kindly or less thoughtful for others, dear Amber. I hope, Robert, you will be in a brighter mood when I get back."

Robert only answered with a slight smile, but when Will had closed the door, he began to walk nervously about the room. Ambrosia knew, in some measure, what was troubling him—that is, she knew he was annoyed about Tom Shepherd, and that he probably suspected she had heard from him.

"I will tell Robert the truth, if he asks me any questions," she said to herself; "for though truth may be blamed, it never can be shamed."

So she sat quite silent, apparently absorbed in the new novel she was reading. There might be five minutes of this silent reading and silent walking, and then Robert paused before his wife and said:

"Ambrosia, my dear, did you have a letter from your brother this morning?"

"Yes, Robert."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing in particular. He was annoyed at your action last night. That was natural. I was annoyed myself."

"I have explained to you, my dear. I am sorry if I did not make my conduct satisfactory."

No answer.

"Were you not satisfied?"

"There is no use in discussing that matter; let it pass."

"I cannot let anything pass that annoys you. Have you answered your brother's letter yet?"

She colored vividly, and said, with an air of great worry:

"Cannot you let the subject alone, Robert?"

"Not until we come to some conclusion. I am unhappy about it."

"I have made no complaint."

"But you made me feel as if I had been unkind to you. I do not like you to feel anything so untrue and so unjust."

"Very well; I will forget all about the circumstance. It is not a pleasant one to remember."

"Yes—but—I do not want you to be troubled with his letters. Whether you answer them or not, they must annoy you—and he might—he might want you to meet him somewhere—he is quite capable of such an imprudence."

"Robert, I promise you that if Tom ever writes and asks me to meet him anywhere, I will give the letter to you to answer."

Now, if Robert Carter had been a sensible man about women he would have been satisfied with this assurance. It was all he ought to have desired. But he had little married experience, and he had a craving to see whether Amber—whether *his* wife—would tell a lie to him about her movements. It was a form of jealousy which could not be laid by any exorcism less than the proof it demanded ; and so, instead of accepting Amber's promised confidence, he sat down in front of her, and laying his hand upon her book, he said :

"Amber, dear, I would like you to tell me just what Tom said to you in his letter."

She rose proudly, and without a word went for Tom's letter and gave it to him. He grew crimson with passion as he read, and with some difficulty spoke with any show of calmness.

"This letter is a vulgar piece of impertinence. Of course you did not go to Maillard's! The idea of your own brother asking you to commit such an indiscretion as to keep an appointment unknown to your husband! The man must be a moral imbecile! How did you answer his request? I hope you did not answer it at all."

"Yes, I answered it. Of course I answered it."

"What did you say?"

"I did not write at all."

"Did you go to Maillard's?"

"Yes. I went there, as he wished, at one o'clock."

He had feared her answer so that his heart stood still. At the bravery of the truth it throbbed wildly with the relief and satisfaction. He felt that he

could forgive all the imprudence for the honesty of her confession. Yet, as often happens, he said perhaps the most imprudent and irritating of words.

"I am astonished at you! And you must promise me never to do such a thing again."

"I have already promised myself. That is all that is necessary."

"I am satisfied with the promise to yourself; still, I think you might also make it to your husband."

"I do not understand why you trouble yourself with the matter at all. I shall do what is right, and you may just as well begin to rely on me now as later."

"I confess that I am more ready to do so now than ever before. Amber, my dear, I will tell you something: I saw you at Maillard's, and I was sick with anxiety lest you should deny it to me! Thank God, you rose to my highest hopes!"

As he spoke she grew white and then crimson with anger.

"You watched me!" she cried. "You did such a shameful thing as to watch your wife! And then you feared I would lie to you! How dare you confess that you offered me such an indignity? I will never forgive you! Never! Never!"

"But, Amber, dear Amber, I did not— You do not understand. It was an accident. I declare to you—"

"I wish no apologies—no excuses. The fact is sufficient. If you saw me, you ought to have come to me. You ought to have spoken both to me and

to Tom. You were coward enough to watch me by stealth!" And refusing to listen to anything her husband would say, she went out of the room in a flame of passion.

Ten minutes later, as she stood in her chamber wringing her hands and trying to persuade herself she had done quite right, she heard the doctor go heavily down the stairs and clash the street-door after him. And a great weight fell upon her heart. She could not comfort herself, and there was none else to comfort her.



CHAPTER VIII.

“ENTER MR. JACK MADISON!”

“Thus saith my Chloris bright
When we of Love sit down and talk together;
‘Beware of love, dear. Love is a walking sprite;
And Love is this and that,
And, oh, I know not what,
And comes and goes again, I wot not whither.’”

So Bessie went to Texas. With the supersensitiveness of youth, she regarded her assertions to Ambrosia on the subject as binding on her. She was sure the “everybody” of her world would hear of the intention, and she felt equally sure she would be called upon to explain the reasons for breaking it.

“And I would rather go than to have to answer questions and listen continually to assurances that they are so glad I did not go,” she thought.

Then, as soon as the conclusion of Texas was fairly accepted, she began to find many sources of comfort in it. People would talk about her; they would see that she was in no hurry to claim what advantages society had to offer. A doubt as to the costumes she had bought for the winter’s festivities had invaded her heart since Ambrosia’s visit; but

in Texas they would be overwhelming. And the opera-cloak originally intended for Cousin Amber could go to Cousin Louisa. It would be an entirely new life, and she wanted so much to be a fine equestrienne. Could she have any better riding-school than Texas? And her cousins, James and Alphonse, would be her teachers. Also, it was a little pleasure to reflect that Mrs. Dr. Carter would have no opportunity of patronizing her from the platform of her married superiority. And Bessie could not avoid a smile of gratification as she made this reflection :

"For I hate to be patronized," she said softly, "and more especially by Amber. No, indeed ! I prefer going to Texas. And Mr. Will Carter thrown at me as a bribe ! Too small, far too small ! I think one of the Texan cousins would be better."

So the packing and preparation for Texas was accomplished under very fair hopes. And the glory of youth is that it can make its own hopes. As the project became more certain, it became more enjoyable ; so that she finally went away radiant with the prospect of the fresh experiences before her. And though she was not yet "in society," there was quite a gay party at the steamer to send her off with smiles and fluttering kerchiefs and outspoken good wishes. And, above all, her father absolutely left "the works" in the middle of the day to be one of the party ; a thing unprecedented, because the manager was also away ; and a proof beyond all others he could have given her of his pleasure in her cheerful obedience to his wishes.

To be sure, it was gray, cold weather, and the sunshine was all to make. But, after all, is there any sunshine like that manufactured by happy hearts?

"YOU ARE A HEARTLESS CREATURE, AMBER!"—See Chapter VII.



The captain took the pretty maiden under his special protection ; and she had Mrs. Gonzales for company and a delightful *vis-à-vis* at the table in the person of Mr. John Newton. At first she thought he would not be agreeable ; but before the evening was over he had done a hundred pleasant, kindly things, and Mrs. Gonzales was sure, from his manner, that he was a person of the highest distinction.

The next two days were exceedingly wet and blowy ; and Mr. Newton and Bessie had the cabin, and especially the deck, almost to themselves. It must be admitted that neither seemed to be aware of the circumstance. They sat for hours in a cozy corner, Bessie propped with stiff leather cushions, and Mr. Newton on the other side of the bulwark, talking about Bessie's summer experiences. Mr. Newton had never been out of America. He asked Bessie all sorts of questions about railways and hotels and shopping and mountain-climbing and musical matters and picture-galleries, and so got the little maid to reveal her whole innocent heart under the pretense of getting information.

Undoubtedly all people like to give advice, even very young girls, and to Bessie it was a new and charming experience. Her pretty airs of superior knowledge, her wisdom about curios and couriers and cab-drivers and Swiss landlords, were a delightful thing to John Newton. He never wearied of being taught by her. And when the rain moderated, he took fresh lessons in European tactics on deck ; for though he was ignorant on that special subject, he was very skillful in helping a young lady into her wraps and taking her safely up a sloping companion-way and supporting her on a reeling quarter-deck.

Then came the deliciously warm nights of the southern latitudes—the mellow moonlight, the phosphorescent seas, the dreamy Florida Keys, the magic skies and airs of the Mexican Gulf. Day by day the little girl fell more deeply in love, and knew it not, for it was honestly her first experience of the kind. Never before had she been the first and the last and the only thought of any man; and this man was so handsome, so noble-looking, so intelligent, so good-hearted and good-natured and, as a final excellence, so well dressed, so properly dressed for all occasions.

Indeed, life had become a most wonderful joy to Bessie long before they reached the Texan coast—a joy she did not try to analyze but just took as it was given, shining and glorious, from Love's rosy hands. It was enough to come out of her stateroom in the morning and find John watching for her; enough to eat with him and read and talk with him and feel his loving thought and care encompass her round about continually. Enough for the days were the blessedness thereof. She did not inquire of the future at all.

Not until they lay off Galveston Bar, and the soft night-wind brought to them the scent of the myrtles and oleanders, and they could see the fair, white city lying asleep in its rose-gardens—then, as they stood hand in hand, silent and sensitive, the query came to both hearts and would no longer be put aside.

"We must part to-morrow! Shall we ever meet again?"

"Oh, I hope so; I do, indeed. I should be very miserable if I thought differently."

With such an opening, John did not find it hard to speak the words he wished to say; and Bessie found it a very happy thing to listen to them. Ten minutes sufficed to bring love's sweet catechism to a clear question and answer.

"If I can satisfy your father—and I am sure I can—then, Bessie, you will faithfully keep your promise and be my wife?" said John.

And Bessie answered:

"I will faithfully be your wife."

"And suppose I take a little trip into Mexico while you are in the interior? I will certainly be in Galveston in March, and we will sail back to New York together. Would you like that?"

"I would like it very much. But, of course, I do not know the exact date, nor yet the name of the steamer."

"Never mind. I shall find those things out. You will see that I shall not miss you. Are you determined not to write to me? Just a line or two every month would make me happy."

"I would rather not write. My uncle would wonder. He might think it proper to name the correspondence to father. That would put us at a disadvantage. I wish you to be the first to speak of our love for each other. I dare say you will see some Mexican beauty before I go back north, and so forget all about your tryst with me. If I am disappointed I do not want any one but myself to know I have made a mistake."

There was but one answer to this supposition, and John made it with loving eloquence. It took a long time to make it; it was midnight when they parted; and before sunrise a small steam tug from the city

arrived at the bar, bringing on it Colonel Sam Madison and his son Alphonse. Then Bessie and Mrs. Gonzales were called, and in an hour they were swinging round on the little tug for the city. Bessie was not averse to this early move, for their steamer was likely to be delayed some hours at the bar; but she was seriously annoyed at Mr. Newton's non-appearance.

True, at the last moment, she saw a hand wave a white kerchief to her; but she had expected something more than this mere courtesy. It was not flattering to think of John sleeping so late and so soundly while she was leaving him perhaps forever. And though the coming of her uncle had been totally unexpected, and though John had not been informed of it, "yet, for all that and every other thing, John ought to have felt I was going away, and been on deck to bid me good-bye," Bessie sadly reflected.

This accident of a late sleep was much against Mr. Newton. Bessie was offended, and in her angry mood she told herself, and with some likelihood that, "after all, it was only a 'ship flirtation.' " She had heard the girls on the great Atlantic liners talk of such affairs—how far they had gone, and how little every word and promise meant, and she concluded that she had been "a passing amusement" for an old, experienced traveller.

It was not a pleasant admission, and she put it aside as much as possible, and gave all her attention to her new relatives. They were very interesting men, and they were quite unlike New Yorkers. The colonel was an older-looking man than her father—tall, sallow, silent, with fierce mustachios and a big soft hat. Alphonse was a juvenile picture

of him. They encouraged Bessie to do all the talking, and sat looking at her with evident and pleased astonishment. And yet, though Alphonse was undoubtedly a very fine-looking youth, Bessie did not think it at all likely she would fall in love with him.

"Neither will he fall in love with me," she decided. "He was not so impressed on sight, I am sure; and though I interest and please him, I am not his ideal woman; nor is he my ideal man."

At Austin the colonel's buggy was waiting, and Alphonse, on a very fine horse, rode by their side. On horseback, in top-boots and bell spurs, big Mexican stirrups and gauntlets, Alphonse looked a splendid type of manhood, and Bessie had at least a sentiment of pride in so handsome a cousin. It seemed really as if the horse's mettle and courage passed into the rider. Alphonse looked gallant, capable, possible, and Bessie wished the riders in Central Park could only have a vision of this Centaur on a Texas prairie. She turned to her uncle and said:

"Cousin Alphonse looks so much better on horseback. He is a different man."

The colonel was pleased at the frank commendation. It promised well for his ardent desire. He stooped forward and watched his son a minute or two, and then said, with more interest than usually informed his words:

"Alphonse is a pretty tall fellow on a horse's back. On his own feet he is only half there."

An hour or two before sunset, the colonel told Bessie that they were now upon their own land, and he pointed out with pride the evidences of the fine

"stands" of corn, and cotton which had been raised upon it. And just as the red sun touched the horizon they came near to the Madison Place. It stood upon a little eminence, and the grounds sloped down on every side to the creek and to the level prairie. Great live-oaks stretched out their limbs behind it as widely as possible, Texan to the last twig; vast dark pecans stood sentinels at all its four corners, and the firm sward was dotted all over with the glossy osage, the redbud, the sloe and the chinquapin. It was a large, square white house, with no end of piazzas and lattices and "additions," all tied together with an indistinguishable tangle of vines. The double door stood wide open, and as the buggy drove toward it a young man rose from some sheltered seat and came to the head of the flight of white steps. He stood there long enough for Bessie to notice that he was quite good-looking and also dressed with considerable taste and care. Then he slowly stepped down to the side of the buggy.

"Your cousin, James Madison," said the colonel to Bessie.

And Cousin James gave Bessie his arm and led her up the steps, talking to her the while in a low, soft, drawling voice that was not unpleasant. As they approached the door, Miss Madison came forward with a pretty effusiveness which was a tribute for the occasion. For she possessed in a remarkable degree the elegant inertia which in different ways characterized her brothers. All her attitudes were graceful and full of repose.

Bessie looked at her with a curious pleasure. She was not the least like Ambrosia, and yet she was more beautifully in unison with her surroundings

than Ambrosia would have been. The long black-silk dress, with its drooping laces, the crimson flowers, the red coral were not the idea of any New York *modiste*, but they were accessories suiting to perfection the ivory-like pallor of Louisa's face, her large, liquid, brown eyes, her black hair and tall, lissome figure.

After dinner, the colonel soon left the young people together, and they were not long in finding out each other very correctly. For in no case was there any attempt to hide their real characters. Both Alphonse and James considered their natural individualities quite as good and as agreeable as any which they could assume; and Louisa would simply have found it too much trouble to play a part, for she always thought the things and did the things which Louisa Madison would be expected to do and to think. Her religious and domestic duties were faithfully performed, and she found it a conscientiously comfortable position to pay even the mint, anise and cummin that society demanded.

Alphonse, generally speaking, echoed all his father's opinions, and he was subject to the same indefinable, somber inertia. James was more vivid in intellect, more eager about his own welfare. He was at present at the poetic stage of his mental powers, and he wrote “lines” and “sonnets” which would have made him a local reputation fifty years ago. Besides which, he really played the piano well, and could interpret himself in his various moods through the melancholy Chopin or the sensuous Rossini. On various subjects of the day he had written his opinions for the *Austin Gazette*, and he kept these printed opinions in his scrap-book and

was very proud of them. For nothing in this life is stranger than the burning anxiety to teach, which those feel who are themselves just learning. It never seems to enter their minds that the thoughts of life so new and strange to them are old and stale to others.

Still, these divers elements blended very happily together that night. James played and recited and read quotations from his scrap-book ; Alphonse listened and asked questions ; Louisa looked very lovely and smiled approval ; and Bessie suggested and chattered ; the result being that James and Bessie were the active players in the little household drama, and Alphonse and Louisa the passive observers of it.

Bessie, however, had, in one respect, a great advantage over her cousins. She was behind the scenes. Her father had made her familiar with the position. She knew the care that brooded in the handsome rooms, and she was not impressed by the number of servants and carriages and horses and the constant coming and going of visitors. These things represented nothing to the practical little New York girl but ruinous extravagance. And she could not help speculating as to what the future of these elegant young people would be, if they had to face the actual struggle of life and earn their daily bread.

Would Alphonse be then able to afford himself such a number of fine saddle and driving horses and such tip-top riding- and driving-suits of clothing ? Would James's fine embroidered linen and gorgeous waistbands and silk hosiery be suitable for any work his soft white hands could do ? And how would Louisa meet daily life without her maid and her laundress, her private pony and negro groom and all

the expensive accessories of her domestic state? As for her uncle Sam, Bessie was sure poverty could only affect him through his children, for his personal wants appeared to be of the simplest kind.

But in her latter estimate, Bessie reasoned as a woman generally does reason, from the appearance of things. Uncle Sam's wants were really of the most extravagant order. He wanted money to spend freely in procuring the votes necessary to keep him in certain political powers, and no small sum was sufficient for this purpose. He liked to have people say that Colonel Madison owned the fastest horses and the finest breeds of cattle in the State of Texas. He paid large sums for imported hunting-dogs. He was unable to say: "No!" if an old friend asked him for either his name or his money. He was, in fact, the son of a dead past—a past of extravagant social and political obligations, and he had not been able to emancipate himself from all its shadowy claims.

It was often very difficult for Bessie to believe that the colonel and her father were really brothers. She was so sure that in very few of the affairs of life they would decide alike; for she did not reflect that men are changed far more by their surroundings than by any mysterious mental or spiritual influence. Her father had been transplanted at an early age to a different climate and a different order of business and social life. He had taken on the color and the very nature of his surroundings. It had been a vital necessity that he should do this; and self-preservation is a law all are disposed to satisfy. His brother had been naturally and circumstantially led in very different directions. But both men were the outgrowths of their environments—their faults

and their virtues being as consequent and individualized as any of the most ordinary results of natural law.

This diversity of action, even where interests were the same, was shown in the conduct of the two brothers relative to the proposed marriage as a means of saving the Madison Texan estate. Bessie's father trusted his daughter with every detail. He said to her plainly :

"The land will be a veritable dukedom in another generation. The house is the cradle of our family. My brother is dear to me. I know nothing of his children. But at the last, Bessie, blood is thicker than water ; and if you could love either of the boys I would be glad enough to spend the thirty thousand dollars necessary to keep the old home in the family and the name. But mind ! You are to be the judge. You are not to marry either of them unless you think them worthy of your affection and safe to trust your happiness with. Whatever you decide, Bessie, will influence me in the matter entirely."

On the contrary, the colonel had said nothing to his sons or his daughter of the real state of the case. What he did say was :

"Your cousin, Bessie Madison, of New York, is not very well. I rather think my brother is a trifle anxious about her. She is all the child he has. I have asked her here for the winter, and I hope you will all try and make the visit very pleasant to her."

He made these remarks one evening as he sat with his family on the piazza, and there was a few minutes' silence after them. Alphonse, James and Louisa alike wondered at this sudden renewal of kindness between relatives so long absolutely ignored,

but none of them cared to make any query about their wonder. James was ready to speak first, and he only said :

"I hope she is pretty and presentable—and not prejudiced. Northern girls can say such disagreeable things, if they like, about our ways ; they are so clever."

"She is only a girl in her teens. She is not likely to know much about our ways. And I dare say she has inherited tendencies toward them."

"I hope she is stylish and dresses well," said Louisa.

"She has just come from Paris. I suppose she would get some dresses there."

"Any girl with ordinary intelligence would. I wish I had the opportunity. I should improve it."

"And she has plenty of money. Brother is worth a million—perhaps two millions. This girl is all he has to heir it. I reckon it will be as well not to tell the Duke boys about her money. If it is known there will be no keeping them—and others, too—away."

"James," said Louisa, "that advice is for you. Father, you must know that James is reading his 'poems' to Azalia Davis now."

The colonel laughed in a low, queer fashion, and then answered :

"Jim is taking his poems to a good market, then."

"Sir, I am led by no such mean motive."

"Pardon, Jim ! I meant no harm. Far from it. I only say that Azalia Davis has plenty of land and sixty thousand dollars in cash. If you can pass in your poems for the title-deeds and the vouchers, I say you do a thing to be proud of. I only mean that if

my niece Madison's millions cannot be for the Madisons, I do not want them to go to the Bownes or the Cookes or any of that crowd. That is all."

"Let Alphonse look after them," said James.

"Alphonse will never count love and dollars together," answered the young man, hotly. "I would not sell the best part of myself for twenty millions!"

"You ought to be the poet of the family, Alphonse," said the colonel, with an indifferent air.

"I hope she will have some miraculous costumes. Her money is nothing to me," sighed Miss Madison.

"Well, I reckon, children, her money would be important to all of us. There is a mortgage hanging over Madison that has got to be lifted soon, and a few hundred thousand dollars would make the ranch the show-place in the State of Texas."

"No answer was made to this assertion, and the colonel was willing to let his case rest here. Neither Alphonse nor James needed more than the word proverbially said to be sufficient for the wise. It did not appear to influence Alphonse in the least. He followed his usual ways, and never named Bessie's advent again. James believed himself to have exhibited a like indifference. But Louisa noticed that James went into Austin to see his tailor very frequently, and that he did not go as frequently as before to visit Miss Azalia Davis. Evidently, then, James was holding his affections in abeyance.

But he made no objections to Alphonse going to Galveston with his father to meet the expected heiress. James never forgot details, and he had considered the value of first impressions, and decided that it was against a man's appearance to go out in the gray mist before dawn to meet a

steamer at the Bar. He could not, under the circumstances, wear the dress most becoming, and the very effusiveness of such a proceeding was foreign to his disposition. The fine linen, the elegant house *deshabille*, with the languors and dawdling it permitted, were more suitable to James's idea of a perfect gentleman. He held the usual Southern belief, also, that all New Yorkers lived and moved and had their being in a rush and a push; and he was sure that a little graceful repose would be telling with a girl who was accustomed to hurry and flurry and perpetual restlessness.

These were the conditions into which Bessie Madison came. They did not, of course, reveal themselves all at once. It was only now and then she got the key to some misunderstood position. For every one was bound to serve her, to do her honor, to find her amusement. She was taught how to ride and how to drive, and also how to dance with a grace that no Parisian master has ever dreamed of. The colonel himself selected her pony and gave her first lessons in its management, and then when she had become familiar with its temper and its gaits, Alphonse and James accompanied the two girls for a gallop every morning.

And surely if Love could have been called at will, these were mornings to summon him; for no time, except a Texan spring, can be lovelier than a Texan fall. Such ineffable skies and atmosphere! Such scents of sweet, dying shrubs and flowers! Such pungent, balmy odors from the distant pines! Such mysterious enchantments in the silent woods, where the very flowing of the water had a sleepy sound, as if it was the lullaby of nature! In these quiet woods

they often dismounted and sat down together on the soft turf. The still melancholy made them all silent. They were content to enjoy that mental state which so often invades even the lightest heart at the close of the year, when neither thinking nor even dreaming they let personality flutter away in a delicious torpor or semi-oblivion.

Then, perhaps, after a long pause, James would softly remark :

"In the spring these woods were restless with life."

Or Louisa would sigh :

"How magnificent are these trees! How delightful it is to rest under them!"

And Bessie would reply :

"Besides, they do not grow for human admiration. We do that."

Or Alphonse would slowly rise and advise a return home, "because in an hour the sun might be uncomfortably warm."

And then the soft, dreamy inertia would be gone in a moment, and an almost riotous mirth take its place; and so, racing and laughing, home be made in a flutter which had nothing in it but simple physical excitement.

But what is there to tell in a life whose chief interests are riding and dressing and eating and dancing and visiting? The greatest painter can give no individuality to a picture of a ball-room, for one ball-room is just like another ball-room; and days of riding and visiting and nights of dancing and flirting are very much alike, unless, indeed, love or sorrow or some other mental emotion comes in to elevate and inform their mere physical character.

In Bessie's case, love did not seriously interfere. She had many lovers, but among them not one whom she loved. The memory of her lover at sea closed the door of her heart against all other applicants. She did not hear a word from him. She did not know where he was. It was possible she would never see him again. But behind every such doubt stood a conviction clear as light and strong as life, that she would see him again, that he would meet her at Galveston in March, that he did love her, that he was worthy of her love, and that he would prove himself so, even to her father's satisfaction.

Soon after the New Year, James abandoned his hopes of ever winning his cousin. There was a wall of contradictions between James and Bessie, that no love or even interest could surmount. He felt that Bessie did not appreciate his fine mental powers, that she did not even admire his physical advantages, and James Madison was of that wise order of men, who can sing complacently of any woman :

"If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?"

Bessie was aware of the change as soon as it took place. She said to her cousin Louisa :

"James has deserted me. He has concluded that a girl who has so little taste for poetry and so little aptitude for worshipping the poet is not the girl to make him happy," and she sang softly the mournful words and melody of the "Mocking-Bird:"

" 'I feel like one forsaken! Forsaken! Forsaken!
I feel like one forsaken,
And the mocking-bird is singing o'er—'

etcetera, etcetera. I wonder if the pretty Azalia

Davis will take him into favor again. I noticed that she did not speak to him at the Capitol Ball."

"I dare say they will make up the quarrel. Azalia has always liked James. They will talk about you and then be lovers again."

"You mean they will say disagreeable things about me?"

"Not very disagreeable. James would not say anything ungentlemanly. But he may permit Azalia to be sorry for you. I rather think James himself is a little sorry for you."

"Because I have not fallen in love with him?"

"Well—he thinks you ought to have done so. Most girls do."

"Alphonse is a great deal more manly and a great deal more interesting than James."

"But not so handsome?"

"I think much more so."

Louisa said: "Oh!" in a tone which greatly annoyed Bessie, and she answered it by a still more positive declaration regarding the good looks and good nature of Cousin Alphonse. This conversation Louisa repeated to her brother Alphonse at the first opportunity. She expected him to be delighted, and he was not. He heard all Bessie's words of praise in silence. His brows were drawn, his mouth closed, there was a visible air of annoyance on his face.

"You do not appear pleased, Alphonse?" she said, at the close of her communication. "Yet you ought to be."

"A man is always pleased to hear that a good and pretty girl admires him."

"And Bessie is so rich! Only think what a grand thing it would be for us if you married Bessie!"

"I do not want to marry Bessie. Surely a girl may admire a man, and a man may admire a girl, without either of them thinking of marriage?"

"I should not suppose so. Marriage would be the natural consideration. Father will be dreadfully disappointed if Bessie and you do not marry."

"I shall be sorry to disappoint father, but—"

"Surely you have given up Margaret Blair? And there is nothing else to prevent."

"Who told you I had given up Margaret?"

"You never call upon her now."

"How can you tell that?"

"Alphonse, surely that trouble is over! Father will never forgive you if that relation is renewed. The girl has neither family nor money. She is not even pretty!"

"She is exceedingly pretty."

"So colorless!"

"She has the loveliest color."

"In her cheeks. Only milkmaids want rosy cheeks."

"She has the bluest eyes and the brightest hair. But we need not catalogue the beauties of Margaret Blair. They are seen at a glance."

"I am sure she is not worth comparison with Cousin Bessie."

"Bessie is beautiful and good-natured and clever; I admit all that."

"And stylish and rich and generous!"

"She has every good quality; but I do not love her; and I do love Margaret."

"I think a man ought to be willing to sacrifice his inclinations for the good of his home and his father

and his sister ; not to speak of his own future or of his descendants."

"You mean, Louisa, that I ought to make my whole life a disappointment for the sake of this house and the acres around it? As for my future, it is in my own hands, and I know nothing about those who are to come after me."

"You will do as you want to do, Alphonse—I have no doubt of that;" and with these words, Louisa made herself comfortable upon the sofa and lifted the novel she was reading.

This conversation took place in January, and many resembling it followed. Louisa was beginning to lose all hope long before her father had a fear. She knew that Alphonse could easily make opportunities for meeting his old love, and she had a conviction he was doing so. For though he was the faithful attendant of Bessie and herself to every festivity, though he seemed to regulate his whole time to their engagements and desires, she felt that his heart was very seldom with them.

Bessie felt it also. The visit began to drag. She was very weary of the perpetual dancing and riding, and she often found herself longing for her father and for New York. Even the thought of Amber and her state dinners was interesting ; and she resolved to make her promise to remain until March mean as early in March as possible. For she felt that her visit had been in its main intent a failure. She had virtually been refused by both her cousins, and in her own eyes she was humiliated by the circumstance, and sometimes a little angry at it.

About the end of January, the engagement of James to Miss Davis was a public fact ; and Azal'a

was much at the Madison place, where she was naturally a person of great importance. In fact, James and Azalia seemed, in their effusive love-making, to usurp the whole interest and sympathy of the house, and Bessie could not help feeling just a trifle in the way. Sometimes she fancied there was an air suppressed pity and triumph in the lovers, which was extremely offensive to her; and yet she could not speak of it even to Louisa, for she knew that she would be told the fancy was entirely an imaginary one.

Besides, she did not like Azalia, who affected an extreme exaggeration of all Southern peculiarities and an extreme astonishment at all Northern fashions and habits. Azalia was full of languors. Bessie's vivacity depressed and wearied her. Azalia played and sang very softly and sweetly certain Lorena-like songs, steeped in mournfulness and pathos. Bessie's little fingers delighted in the tinkling measure of the comic operas or in some sparkling Hungarian mazurka full of quarter-notes. If she sang, her voice had none but mirthful tones. Her smart dresses, her almost boyish vests and collars and short jackets, were very unwomanly in Azalia's eyes; and at every point Bessie and Azalia clashed in the same way.

It was indeed quite impossible for Louisa to avoid giving Azalia the first place when Azalia was present. James and Azalia together were too potent an influence to be resisted. But Bessie resented deeply the secondary position she was then obliged to take. For she was too good-natured and too polite to resist, since resistance meant covert disputation in a house where she was only a visitor.

Even the glory of the advancing spring did not

materially brighten her dissatisfaction. James's wedding was to be solemnized in May, and it was impossible to avoid the constant insistence of the affair in some way or other. At the beginning of March she wrote anxiously to Mrs. Gonzales about their return northward, and she was glad to be informed that they would leave two weeks earlier than the first intention. The day this news arrived was peculiarly welcome. It was a very wet day, and the house was lonely and dreary. The colonel had gone into Austin. James and Azalia had left the preceding night, after wearying everybody out with their claims for advice and attention and sympathy. Louisa was in bed with a nervous headache, brought on, she averred, with helping Azalia and her lover to select from books full of patterns of dress and upholstery goods. Alphonse had disappeared after breakfast, and there was not a sound in the big house, but some fitful exclamation or senseless giggle from the negroes in the kitchen.

Bessie sat down in the chill parlor and took herself seriously to task.

"What am I staying here for?" she asked. "I did not want to marry Cousin James, and he takes a delight in making me observe that he is delighted I did not want to marry him. Cousin Alphonse is good and kind; but I do not want to marry him, and I am sure he does not want to marry me. He is not the least like—*the other*. I wonder if I shall see *him* again. He really loved me. He loved me at once. He did not require to learn how to love me—he knew how! Whether he meets me or forgets me I will not marry any man until he loves me just in that kind of way."

As she sat musing after this fashion, a little chill and very despondent, Alphonse entered the room. He was full of apologies, but evidently so privately happy that he could not feel as if there was any necessity to offer an apology for anything in life. His appearance finally attracted Bessie's curiosity, and she said :

"You look very happy, cousin?"

"I am very happy. I am so happy, Bessie, I should like to tell you why."

"I wonder if I could guess?"

"Try."

"You are in love?"

"Yes."

"And the lady loves you?"

"You are right. How did you guess so well?"

"I had a lover before I came here."

"And you loved him?"

Bessie nodded intelligently.

"I should like to tell you about my Margaret."

"I should like to hear about her. Let us sit down and be confidential."

She moved toward the sofa and motioned Alphonse to sit beside her. He was glad to do so. He wanted some human sympathy in his happiness, and he opened his heart to Bessie. He told her all about his betrothed—how good and lovely and self-denying she was; and, most of all, how long he had adored her.

"This morning she has promised to be my wife if I will make her a home, however humble. Now I must find something else to do than ride round the Madison acres, unless father will pay me an over-

seer's salary. Margaret and I can be happy on very little," he said.

"I suppose James is going to live on the Davis place?"

"Yes."

"Then your father can hardly do without both of you. A great deal of riding seems necessary, and I heard uncle say that no one but Alphonse knew the stock thoroughly."

"If Brother Jack was only here, I would Join Tom Moffat in his horse business."

"'Brother Jack?' I never heard of Brother Jack before."

"Nobody names poor Jack now, and yet a nobler, kinder, handsomer boy never lived. He is two years older than I am. I wish I knew something about him!"

"Has he been long away?"

"Nine years."

"And you have forgotten him, I suppose?"

"I think of him every day."

"Where is he?"

"I wish I knew."

"What did he leave home for?"

"Because, some way, he could not please father, whatever he did. Father has a temper; so has Jack. One morning they had a quarrel about a mare Jack was riding, and father, in a passion, struck Jack. Jack bowed to him in silence and rode away. He never came back."

"But you knew where he went to?"

"He went to the City of Mexico first. He wrote to father from there; but the letter came at a bad hour, and father sent it back. Jack wrote no more."

"Poor Jack! Did you never try to find him?"

"Yes; but without any success. Moffat heard in Mexico that he went with a party to California. But Jack makes no sign, and we never name him."

"I feel a great interest in this unknown Cousin Jack. I believe I can find him. When I get back to New York, I will tell father about Jack, and he is sure to know how to reach the runaway. Alphonse, were you told that my father and your father wished to make a marriage between myself and one of my cousins?"

"I was told of no such compact, but I know that father is exceedingly anxious you and I should marry. James was out of consideration, long since."

"And you, also, Alphonse?"

"If you had shown any love for me, Bessie, it would have been an easy thing to love you in return. But I saw from the first that you were indifferent both to James and myself."

"Thank you for the nice words, Alphonse. Is it not a comfortable thing to be quite honest with each other? Really, you are right. I did not wish to marry either you or James; and I did not believe, in any case, that father would permit the old home to go out of the family. Father's plans never fail, because he can always find more ways than one to a desired end. When I go back home, I shall say: 'Father, I cannot marry either Cousin James or Cousin Alphonse, but there is a Cousin Jack, whom neither of us has seen. Suppose you try to find him in Mexico or California?' There are a largeness and a vagueness about Mexico and California that I

should say would stimulate any professional seeker for the young man."

Alphonse took the suggestion quite seriously.

"I can write to Don Beauregard, who lives now in San Francisco. He likes me, and will put advertisements in the California papers."

"That would be wasted energy. The New York *Herald* is quite sufficient. If Jack is in any of the four corners of the earth, the *Herald* will find him."

"I believe you think the *Herald* is omnipotent."

"And I need not apologize for the assumption. The *Herald* is as adequate to hunting out the smallest question as to dealing with the largest, and quite as cheerfully willing to find a stray child as to dictate the policy of the government."

"You talk as if the *Herald* governed the country."

"We all know it does, or if we do not know it, we ought to. However, even the ubiquitous *Herald* will want a description of Jack. What is he like?"

"Nine years make a difference, but I have a photo of him, taken not very long before he went away."

And Alphonse found the picture in the leather case of his pocketbook, and put it into Bessie's hand.

She gazed at it curiously, with a constantly increasing interest. And Alphonse watched her with an equal interest. Never before had he seen Bessie's face so full of beauty; her cheeks were rosy red; her mouth smiling; her eyes sparkling; and a strange joy lighted up her whole countenance.

"I like that face," she said positively. "Shall I

write down its description, or can you spare the photo?"

"I cannot give up the photo, but I will have it copied for you."

"That will do. Go about it to-morrow. I may leave very soon, now. And, Cousin Alphonse, do not give up your true love. Just as surely as I and you are talking together, everything will come right for Margaret and you. Be patient a little. Can you trust me?"

"Indeed I can, Bessie."

"Say for six months?"

"For all my life!"

"Oh, that is a big promise. I will not ask so much. Be true to yourself and Margaret for six months."

"Six months."

"So long, and no longer. And do not forget to have the photo copied."

"Do you expect to find Jack in six months?"

"I really do. Now I am going to Louisa, but I shall not name Cousin Jack to her. Jack is our secret. Don't forget the photo. It must be copied in a few days."

"Stay and talk a little longer, Bessie. You make life look so different."

"Then go and write a long love-letter to Margaret, and make life look like one large hope to her. If I had a lover, I should insist on love-letters, even if he lived next door to me. Write a long, sweet one, Alphonse. You have no idea how girls do love love-letters."

She left him with his new-found hopes, but she did not go to Louisa. With swift little feet she

sought her own room. She locked the door and sat down and began to laugh softly to herself. Then she got up and went to the looking-glass and gazed at her happy, rosy face and sparkling eyes, and, after another low peal of laughter, she said :

“ My very hair is kinking and curling with laughter. I wonder how I behaved so well ! I do not think Alphonse suspected anything. Now I know why he did not get up to see me leave the steamer at Galveston. There are reasons for everything, of course, if we had opportunities to discover them ; and now I know why Mr. John Newton did not wish to meet Mr. Sam Madison, not to speak of Mr. Alphonse. 'T is a pretty little play as ever was, and I would not spoil it for any consideration. But it will not be very long ere I shall say :

“ ‘ Enter, Mr. Jack Madison ! ’ ”



CHAPTER IX.

BESSIE'S CONFIDENCES.

"Let me, then, take my will for a reason."

* * * * *

"And what but this is sweet—at last to win
The fields of home, that change not while we change."

A creature not too bright and good
For human nature's daily food. —*Wordsworth.*

Toward the end of summer there is often a storm, and nothing is ever the same after it. The glory of the roses is gone, the chill of advancing autumn is felt in the dawning and the gloaming, and we know that winter is not very far off. The quarrel about Ambrosia's brother was of this nature. It broke up the sunny serenity of the doctor's long honeymoon and brought elements of disagreement between his wife and himself. He had feared her truthfulness, and she had resented his want of confidence; and there had been domestic storm, which no power could make *not to have been*. Something had been lost in that passionate passage of words and emotions which no after-sunshine would restore.

To be sure in a few days the circumstance was put out of sight and sound. Ambrosia accepted her hus-

band's overtures of reconciliation, and there was a tacit agreement not to mention the subject again. But it was not forgotten. Robert Carter could not put out of his memory the feeling that he had suffered a great wrong. Ambrosia knew she had lost something—she knew not how to define it—which had hitherto made her a little different and a little higher than other womanhood in her husband's eyes. Disenchantment is a rapid process, and she was aware that it had begun.

"Robert knows now that he has married only an ordinary mortal," she thought. And she sighed and had a moment's keen regret. For the dream of womanhood is still divinity. A girl loves a man who makes her believe she is a goddess.

And the first quarrel between a man and his wife is like the opening of a door. Love locks the door and bids both alike to beware of the room of contention which is behind it. But some day, either because of *cnnui* or wounded self-esteem, or in the very wantonness of their fancied strength of affection, they tamper with the forbidden entrance. A look, a word, a dare, and the unhappy portal is crossed. There is a certain excitement in the act. The dull monotony of their happiness receives a shock which is not all unpleasant. Lovers, married and single, make quarrels on the same principle which leads people without troubles to invent them.

Doctor Carter was, however, too busy a man to think of this kind of amusement, and Ambrosia had many other interests to occupy her time and thoughts. They were for some weeks as happy in the main as it is permitted to mortals to be. The doctor certainly wearied of the frequent dinners and balls he

was compelled to give and to receive, because behind this outward seeming of indefinite time there was a consciousness that he had not time enough for all the duties he ought to perform and all the plans he wished to carry out.

He endeavored at first to gratify both his wife and himself by giving up the hours of sleep to his investigations, but the result of this effort was a nervous irritability and a physical weariness he was quite able to diagnose. He came to the conclusion that he must give up society or resign his profession, and he put the case very frankly before Ambrosia.

She was sure there was some middle way. Women are always in favor of half-and-half measures, and thence cometh their misery. She would not hear of the doctor resigning his lectures and scientific researches. They made him famous. As for his patients they made him rich. And society, she thought, was really his best advertising medium. When he went to a dinner at some multi-millionaire's palace people pointed him out as one of the cleverest and most advanced physicians in America. Multi-millionaires are almost certain to be multi-invalids, and what will not a man give for his health when he has once thrown it away? Ambrosia could fortify her arguments with a most respectable list of patients, and as the doctor had no counter-arguments worth speaking of, the question, though frequently agitated, remained practically unaltered.

This was a case in which Will Carter found himself in an embarrassing position. He was a plain little man, and he felt his physical deficiencies very much. When Ambrosia put on the garments and

the attitudes of a queen, he had a reluctance to be her only attendant. Robert perfectly matched her in stature and in the airs of superb dignity she affected; and if Robert was to bear the weight of the comparison, Will was delighted to be Ambrosia's faithful squire—to carry her fan and cloak, to fetch her an ice and order her carriage, or even to dance with her when a disagreeable partner was to be avoided.

Then, it must be admitted, that Ambrosia had a slight contempt for Will. Adversity had not opened her eyes. She was yet influenced almost entirely by what appealed to the senses. Nothing could make Will Carter handsome, and his intelligence and good heart were not qualities society required or valued. She was ashamed of Will's bad taste in gloves and neckties, of his little embarrassments with young ladies and his effusiveness with old ladies, and she was not proud of his self-denying charities, his wide erudition or his great musical skill. These things were not outward and visible graces like well-fitting gloves and a nonchalant air, and, of course, if people live for society, then the things which society endorses are the things to live for.

So Will, in social matters, could not fill his brother's place; and Ambrosia, very delicately and flatteringly, made the doctor feel this. He blushed with pleasure even while he pooh-poohed the idea, and affected to be a century behind Will in all things lovely and of good report. Yet the personal compliment went into all the little corners of his heart, and he fastened his white necktie that night with a kindly consideration for his pretty wife's youth and her vanity about his own handsome face and figure.

"I ought to be at hospital to-night," he thought; "I really ought. But then Amber ought also to have some company. She is so young and so foolish about going out only with me, and so proud of me, what can I do but try to give her a few hours? Duty is a great 'call;' but, then, there are so many kinds of duties—and Amber loves me!" And, of course, this consideration made it very easy for him to do his duty to Amber.

In domestic life, however, Will had a great and acknowledged influence. It was Will who smoothed away those tempers which came often from Robert's inconsiderate and unavoidable delayings, and who said the soft words which often made wrath impossible. It was Will who went on Ambrosia's little errands, and who hunted the town through for her fancies; who attended to the printing of invitation-cards and the ordering of flowers, and who, in short, spared Ambrosia physically and counseled and consoled her mentally in the many small perplexities and emergencies that social life creates and insists upon.

And Will Carter was particularly well fitted to be the friend of a woman. He had comfortable contradictions in his nature; pleasant minglings of the great and the small. If he was out for an hour or two, he was not above bringing back to Ambrosia all the bits of social gossip he had gleaned on the street and at the club. He noticed women's dresses and men's foibles. People had a natural inclination to tell Will secrets, and Will had no scruples about making Ambrosia as free of them as himself.

"They told me it was a secret," he would say, with a light laugh. "But, then, why should they expect me

to exhibit more reticence than they themselves were capable of? My opinion is that secrets are intended to be told."

One morning in March, he came in with a handful of superb pansies.

"I had to buy them," he said to Ambrosia. "They looked so sweet and so frail and so unable to take care of themselves. You will understand when I tell you I had been calling on Mrs. Capt. Hinton."

"I do not see any resemblance between that woman and these lovely early pansies."

"'Resemblance!' It was the difference that charmed me."

"I suppose she talked to you of all she 'accomplishes,' and then railed at useless women in general?"

"That is her parable, and she cries it from the house-tops and in the market-place, figuratively speaking. She thanked God, as usual, that she had an iron constitution and no nerves and principles of steel. And, *apropos* of it, I heard from her the most pitiless, the hardest and the most scornful gossip about that unhappy Mrs. Southwood."

"Let her look after her own household," said Ambrosia, with a touch of anger. "Every one pities it. She harries her husband and worries her children. She is the most unsympathetic of wives and the most crushing of mothers."

"I can well believe it. No one would ever go to her for help or comfort in any strait."

Ambrosia, who was reclining on a sofa, looked as helpless as possible, and answered softly:

"I am sure you are right, Will. Did you hear what that Frenchman who was staying with the

Ladoux said of her fine large animalism? He was with Miss Annie, and she could not avoid telling it."

"I am ready to hear."

"After listening to a long dissertation on the inefficiency of the present race of women and her own sensible cultivation of her physique, the Frenchman threw himself into an attitude and exclaimed, with one hand in the air:

"*Magnifique ! Splendide ! Sublime ! Pretty good !*"

"Pretty good for the Frenchman! Mrs. Hinton told me, however, that your cousin, Miss Madison, is expected to-morrow. Miss Bessie furnished her with a text for a sermon to girls of eighteen having to go South for the winter. She said she would like to see any of her girls want anything so weak and nonsensical."

"I am glad Bessie is so near New York. I like Bessie. I want you to fall in love with Bessie. Do you hear me, Will Carter? She is just the sweet, merry, bright little maiden you admire. Bessie is intellectual also. She belongs to a Browning society, and she was always trying to improve her mind."

"If ever I fall in love, it will be with a girl inspired by her heart and not by her intellect."

"Next winter I think I shall join a Browning or Ibsen Society."

"I hope you will be better employed. Praise Browning and Ibsen, as the French praise *le grand Corneille*, without having read him."

"No. I am determined to read Browning, though it takes a dozen of us to work through a poem."

"And when you have finished it, what then?"

"Then we shall go comfortably back to our news."

papers and our magazines and our own melodious and understandable Stedman. To-morrow morning order a basket of flowers to be sent early to Bessie. I shall call on her the next day. I do hope she has not engaged herself to one of the Texan young men. Engaged girls are so disagreeable to every man but the chosen one—who is generally disagreeable also."

The flowers met Bessie on her own threshold. She was with her father, and both were in exuberant spirits. The joy of the New Yorker returning to New York was in her heart; and the sight of its busy streets and the tumult of its various life had enthused her like some potent spirit.

"There is not a city in the world like it, father," she said. "It is the best of every other city. It is so familiar and friendly. I cannot tell you how happy I was to wake up this morning and find we were coming up the Hudson. And then Broadway, and the ragmen's chiming bells, and—

" 'High overhead in the midst of the streets, the electrical threadwork,

Striping the air with its lines, like the musical score of a giant;'

those are two lines from a Dutch poem, father. Madam made all the girls learn it when I was at school. And the policemen! They looked so patronizingly and kindly when they noticed me and my trunks. Did I ever tell you what Amber called the policemen?"

She was unwrapping her flowers from their covering of tissue paper as she spoke, and then she saw Amber's card with its few pleasant words of welcome.

"Why, father, the flowers are from Amber! I thought perhaps you had ordered them. Are they not sweet and lovely? Give me New York flowers every time! Such lilies and pansies and smilax! I have not seen a bit of smilax since I left home! How thoughtful of Amber! Oh, I was going to tell you what she called our policemen. The providence of the streets. So they are, to ladies about Twenty-third Street and at the Avenue crossings."

"Did you not see beautiful flowers in Texas?"

"Wild flowers—hum-m! Very fair in the grass. I never cared to gather them. Some kinds did not smell nice; others had no smell at all. I like greenhouse flowers. Cultivation does as much for flowers as for little girls. Are we going to have any breakfast, father? I had only a cup of steamboat coffee before I landed."

"My dear Bessie, order whatever you would like best."

"I will give the order to you and then go upstairs and dress myself like a Christian. Listen: Fried oysters and rare beefsteak and potatoes, with cream and hot biscuit and coffee and fried wheat-cakes and maple-sirup. I think that will do. Please wait for me this morning. I want to talk to you."

"To be sure I will. Can you be ready in one hour?"

"Half an hour is all I want."

She was down again in half an hour, looking fresh and charming, and the breakfast after her own heart was waiting for her. She sat down with an audible sigh of satisfaction, and let her eyes wander over the pleasant table and the handsome room and then back to the blazing fire and her happy looking

father, standing before it, with his morning paper in his hand.

"Put away the *Herald* and talk to me, father," she said. "And here is your coffee. Have you heard much of Cousin Amber?"

"I have heard a great deal about her fine dinners and balls. If the world was only a drawing-room, Amber would be a great authority in it."

"And Uncle Ambrose?"

"He died three weeks ago. Doctor Carter, myself and three others who remembered him were at his funeral. A solemn, mournful ceremony it was. Amber was there, but not Tom. Mrs. Shepherd said he was in Chicago and could not arrive in time. She is a noble woman. Doctor Carter has no words strong enough for her devotion to your poor uncle unto the very last moment."

"How did she bear her great trouble and the changes?"

"She bore her misfortune with the same cheerfulness and moderation as she took her good fortune. I hear she is to remain on the farm, which is absolutely her own."

"I will go and see her as soon as possible. Is that all the news, father?"

"I think it is."

"No wonderful public event to tell me?"

"I am a business man, Bessie, and do not observe public events. A reputation for doing so is as bad as bankruptcy to a business man. Tell me your news. You must have something to tell!"

"Where shall I begin?"

"With your relatives. What do you think of them?"

"I am not a bit ashamed of any of them, and that is a great matter. Uncle Sam is not like you at all, but he is good in his own way. Alphonse is handsome and good-natured, and not very clever. James is very clever, very gentlemanly and about as gigantic a prig as was ever manufactured by what is called 'culture!'"

"A prig? What is a prig?"

"A man who talks too fine to be a real man—a man who fears nothing so much as an indecorum. James has formed a little 'set,' and he and they fancy they are the chosen people. Wherever they go they scatter a rich perfume of correctness. All the strictnesses wait upon their footsteps. James Madison is a society Pharisee, without much belief in any other society Pharisee. And he is going to marry Miss Azalia Davis, who has a small principality in land and sixty thousand dollars in cash. Prigs generally do well unto themselves. So you see I had no chance with James Madison, and if James had graciously inclined himself unto me I could not marry a prig; could I, father?"

"No. I do not think it would have done, Bessie."

"Besides which, James was a political prig. He believed so fully in the superiority of the Southerner, and especially of the Texan Southerner, that he felt the existence of the Northerner, and especially of the New York Northerner, to be an anomaly which it was difficult to explain, unless he discredited the existence of a wise and just Providence. Alphonse and Uncle Sam, now, were straightforward Philistines. I liked them far better."

"Oh! Philistines?"

"Yes. They were for the old order of things and

the old ways, and they frankly said so. They **knew** they were behind the times, and they liked to be so. They made no pretenses, for they thought themselves right on every point; and they preferred to live in Ascalon and Gath, just as Ascalon and Gath were fifty years ago. But uncle is a gentleman—brave, courteous and not at all selfish; and Alphonse is very like him."

"You never thought of falling in love with Alphonse, I suppose, Bessie?"

"Alphonse has been in love with a very nice girl for a long time. Some way I knew he was engaged as soon as I met him. The girl is poor and he cannot marry her, and I think it an awful pity, for they would be so happy. If I were you, father, I should make Alphonse and his beautiful Margaret happy."

"That is your idea, Bessie?"

"All my own. If there is any real merit in it give me the credit. Did you know there was another son, called Jack? I saw his likeness. I think I could have fallen in love with Jack Madison."

"I have heard of him. He ran away from home many years ago. His father said in his letter to me that he had not heard of him since. It is supposed he died in Mexico or California."

"I do not believe he is dead. Suppose we try to find Jack Madison. I think I could feel a great interest in Jack. I got Alphonse to give me a copy of his photo of the runaway."

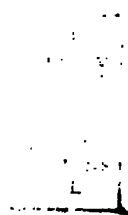
And she took it from a little case, and handed it to her father.

"I have seen a face that is a little like this in expression; and yet it is not a common face."

"It is a very uncommon face. Would it not be a



"FATHER, I AM ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED!"—See Chapter IX.



good thing to find Jack and send the prodigal back to his father? He would be welcomed home, I am sure. Uncle Sam wants him, but he is too stiff-necked a Philistine to say so."

"How did you like your cousin Louisa?"

"There is nothing to disapprove of in Louisa—perhaps she would be nicer if there was. I was always forced to admire Louisa's extreme propriety; and yet sometimes I wished to get away from it. She renders to every person and to every duty their due, and she goes to church regularly on Sunday. Also she is beautiful; she has large, soft-black eyes and warm, white skin and long, black hair and a very tall, elegant figure. All her words are low and musical; all her ways are slow and graceful. She makes you wish to be quiet and sleepy, and I should think a New Yorker would enjoy the simple opiate of her presence. Now, father, I am going to amaze you." And she put down her cup and looked with a smile into his expectant face. "I am engaged to be married."

"Nonsense, Bessie!"

"The truth, father. I met a Mr. John Newton on the steamer, and he fell in love with me; and then he asked me to fall in love with him. He said he knew you would be quite satisfied with his position."

"He is an impudent, conceited jackanapes, whoever he may be!"

"Any man *has to be impudent* in order to ask a girl to marry him. For, with all his impudence, John really trembled when he asked me. He was so afraid I would say: 'No.' But I did not. I said if you would say: 'Yes,' I would say: 'Yes;,' and so he is coming to ask you."

"Bessie, my dear, all this is nonsense. You are too young to marry any one. Even if you had thought of your cousin Alphonse, I should have insisted on two years' delay."

"I dare say John will wait two years."

"It is not a question of 'will.' Now, you have spoiled my breakfast! When is this person coming to see me?"

"I told him to wait a week or ten days. I said I would send a letter to him, at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, at the right time. I want the house in order, and I want some new dresses. I think he is a very fine gentleman, indeed."

"You can tell him to come to my office; I will see him there."

They were his parting words, and he spoke them more sternly than usually. But Bessie was not troubled. She congratulated herself upon getting the confession over so well.

"Some girls would have put it off and off," she thought, "and had a worry and a headache, and perhaps made a mess of the whole affair. Father will get used to the idea before he sees John, and then John will slip into his place quite naturally."

Evidently Bessie was not far wrong in her supposition. Mr. Madison thought of the confidence his daughter had given him all day, and his first words in the evening referred to it.

"I dare say my little girl loves this strange man better than her father already!"

"Tears were in his eyes as he clasped her cheeks between his hands and waited for a reply.

"I can love John more and more every day and

never love you one bit less, dear father," she answered.

"Can you not love me more and more every day?"

"No! I love you perfectly now. I cannot love you any more when you have already all my heart. You see I have been loving you for nearly nineteen years. Poor John has only been with me about ten days."

"Poor John got a long way in ten days—"

"Love wears the seven-leagued boots. You look weary, father. Surely you have not been trying to catch Love?"

"I have had lots of other things to think about. I have been alone for nearly three weeks again. I cannot tell what has come over my manager. He has taken more holidays this year than I like. His absence leaves too much on my shoulders."

"Perhaps he is in love."

"Do not judge the whole world by yourself, Bessie. But I have promised him a share in the business, and I must keep my word with him. That will satisfy his desire and make him stick to the office. It will indeed be necessary, as I intend to spend this summer travelling with you."

"Oh, dear! Am I to go away again? Let us travel in New York. I am sure there are as many queer places here as in London or any other foreign city."

"But I want to see foreign cities. And if I take you to Europe, I may have you all to myself for a little while before you get married. I think I have a right to that."

"I would not be selfish, father. Selfishness is not

a bit like you. Besides, you know John might go to Europe also."

"Then he must take a different route. I saw Doctor Carter as I came home, and he says Amber is not very well. His brother Will was with him. You never saw Will, did you?"

"No. Amber kindly thought I might possibly be good enough for Will's wife. I should not think of aspiring so high, for Will Carter's goodness is quite proverbial."

Then she turned the conversation upon the improvements she wished made in the house, and after dinner Mr. Madison went through every room with her.

"It shall be as perfect as possible before next winter," he said. "You will not really make your *début* before then. In two months we shall be away, and the workmen can take possession. Have you seen Doctor Carter's house? Would you like your drawing-rooms like Amber's?"

"Nothing at all like them. I want mine to be unique and rather startling. I shall go to the Astor Library and look through all their big books of interior decorations. Mrs. Starit got her queer, splendid ideas there—or rather, her decorator did. I have sense enough to make my own selections. When I have done so, you can come and look at them. What kind of an idea is that, father?"

"A very good one."

"Then to-morrow I will begin to carry it out—that is, if Amber calls early."

"I hope you will have a pleasant visit. Some one was saying that Amber was 'a little difficult' since her marriage."

"We shall get along. New Yorkers never quarrel; they only say disagreeable things in the most agreeable manner. It comes natural to us. Only English women tell truths to each other. Then they never forgive the things said, but have a nice, comfortable, steady quarrel that lasts them as long as they live. New Yorkers have no time for that kind of amusement. We forgive each other our trespasses every night. Amber and I start fairly to-morrow, unless I should have an unpleasant dream about her. Father, suppose I write to John and ask him to take dinner with us to-morrow night?"

"I thought you said ten days?"

"Is there any use in putting off a pleasure? John will come whenever I ask him, and then you can talk with him about me. It will be so much nicer to have the thing settled and done with."

"I will see him in my office."

"I do not like to be talked about in the office, as if I were 'business.' I think he had better come to dinner to-morrow, eh, father?" and she emphasized the request with a caress, that the doting father could not refuse.

"You get your own way with me always, Bessie. Do you expect this 'John' to be as complacent to you?"

"I have begun in the right way. That is something. I will write for John, and you will see how readily he will obey me."



CHAPTER X.

THE NEW PARTNER.

What is the meaning of thy thought,
O maiden fair and young?
There is such a pleasure in thy eyes,
Such music on thy tongue!
There is such glory on thy face;
What can the meaning be?
"I love my love, because I know
My love loves me!" —*Charles Mackay.*

"I suppose I must go to see Bessie Madison this morning."

Doctor Carter was reading an article in the *Lancet* and did not hear the remark. So Will answered for him.

"Would you like me to go with you, Amber?"

"No. Bessie is so moody. She might be glad to see you, and again she might not. Under any circumstances she is sure to be provoking."

"Oh! That is saying a great deal."

"She has been in Texas all winter, and she has doubtless come back with the fixed idea that the heart of the world beats under the Texan prairies."

"Then I shall go and take Miss Radway to the museum."

"If you like that kind of a girl, take her by all means."

"She is very clever. Mrs. Abel Theyer has requested her to give a parlor lecture on the Elizabethan poets."

"I heard her talking about Pope and Goldsmith. She said they were mere rhymsters, whose effusions would now go into any editor's waste-basket. **She** is proud to be the exponent of *The Present*. I rather think she considers her own existence would have been impossible in any less cultured era."

"Still we must do her justice. She does leave Homer and Virgil and even Shakespeare on their pedestals. And she does admit that New York, in point of culture, has really proved better than her expectations."

Amber laughed, and then asked, with a pretty air of scorn :

"What can she know of Jerusalem, she being a Samaritan?"

"Which, being interpreted, means, what can she know of New York, she being a Bostonian? She gave me a very good description of New York, however—'a city made straight; idealized after Euclid; without character or expression.'"

"New York suits New Yorkers. We like our streets straight. With all our traffic and business, it is hard work to keep straight streets clean. How should we manage with crooked ones?"

"What are you saying about dirty streets?" queried the doctor, throwing down his paper and turning to his breakfast. "Our streets *are* dirty. They are a disgrace to the city. They are responsible for much of the sickness of all kinds that—"

"Robert, dear, what are you talking about?"

"I beg pardon. What were you talking about?"

"Miss Radway. You said you met her at General Dixon's."

"A very clever person. She gave me the history of the Woman's Rights Movement in a very clear, succinct manner. I was astonished at the advances already made. If it goes on, we may all live to vote for a woman as President."

"Then," said Amber, "we must change the emblem of the Republic. The thunder-grasping eagle will turn out to be a hen, after all."

She made the remark with an apparent seriousness that was very laughable; and the doctor and Will not only laughed heartily, but tossed the idea to and fro until it was laughed out, and Ambrosia said:

"That is enough of Miss Radway. To talk about her is very small talk indeed. I will go back to my first position. I ought to call upon Cousin Bessie this morning; and if I go there I must ask her to dinner. She has really never seen our house yet. Of course, the dinner will have to be a very small, quiet affair. What night will you be at liberty, Robert?"

"My dear, dear Amber, I have not a single night to spare. Young girls will not care whether I am present or not. Will is ready to take my place, I know."

"I want *you*, Robert. Girls, more than any other class, expect to see a wife with her husband. Middle-aged men and women would understand that you had your profession to attend to; girls think a husband ought, first of all, to attend to his wife. If you

are not at my side, Bessie will be sure we have been quarreling, or that at least you do not care for me."

"But just now, my dear, when my duties are drawing to their conclusion and my investigations to their results, I cannot possibly leave them an unnecessary hour."

"You mean that you do not wish to leave them. My pleasure is of no consequence. I am not a *germ* of any kind." And she left the room with an air of injury that was painful enough.

No one likes to be made to feel as if he were cruel and unjust, and the doctor turned to his brother and said fretfully:

"Whatever must I do, Will? How can I leave the most serious and important work to chatter to half a dozen school-girls? It is cruel to ask me."

"Robert, you waste a great deal of time doing work some clever young man could do for you. Get a secretary."

"Amber is so unreasonable."

"Dear me! I wish some lovely woman would only be unreasonable about me! Get a secretary, Robert, and do not worry and work yourself to death. Let me advertise for one this morning. I must tell you a little truth: You also have been cross and unreasonable sometimes lately."

"Truth used to live at the bottom of a well," answered the doctor, with a touch of anger, "but she is now a man's wife and his brother and gives him her candid opinion on his own hearthstone. But do as you like, Will! Advertise by all means if you think young men capable of doing my work are plentiful."

"You saw how grieved Amber was?"

"She is always grieved."

"Very often she is delightful. You know she is not quite well, Robert."

"All right, and I am wrong. Advertise, Will, if you think it will give me more time. Amber ought to know how full of interest my work is to me at present."

"It is a wise wife who knows her husband, Robert. Amber loves you better than she understands you. Is not love more than knowledge? Shall I advertise for a secretary?"

"If you wish. I do not see how any one can do my work."

"But you would not dislike one?"

"The subject is quite indifferent to me."

As if the entrance of a strange human being into any home could be indifferent! As if the crossing of a threshold, even by a servant girl, was not often fraught with the most tremendous consequences! For who can tell what evil or good fortune, what conditions of weal or woe, of joy or sorrow, of life or death, enter a family with some apparently insignificant man or woman? Where an evil angel cannot go, *he may send*; and the old divine who every morning at his closed door prayed: "Lord, be Thou my Porter this day and suffer nothing that can injure me or mine to cross this threshold," had a clearer divination of *safe living* than perhaps he himself understood.

Will, who was generally thoughtful, did not in this case send his fears so far ahead. It was Mr. Madison, who that morning gave place to some very unusual reflections of a similar tendency: "It is nearly nine years since the boy came to me and I took him

to my heart and sent him to college and then initiated him into the secrets of my business. And now, it seems, he has secretly won my Bessie's heart and my daughter, and my money will eventually be his. Well! Well! Men plan and labor and rise early and work late and eat the bread of carefulness and know not for what strange man or woman they may be toiling. Still it might have been worse—it might have been much worse."

He entered his office with a heart troubled by such considerations, and his eyes fell at once upon a very handsome young man. He was examining the mail, but he threw down the letter in his hand and swung his chair round to face Mr. Madison.

"Uncle, good morning!" he cried, with a radiant face. "How glad I am to see you again!"

"Good morning, John. I expected you yesterday."

"I did reach New York yesterday, but I had to go to my tailor's, and he kept me a long time, and then I had a little shopping to do, and before I was aware the day was practically over."

"Where have you been, John?"

"To Texas."

"To see your father at last?"

"No. I went only as far as Galveston. I came home with my cousin Bessie."

"You ought not to have let Bessie tell me that. I have found you out, John; but I would rather you had been perfectly frank with me. I do not like anything secret, especially about Bessie."

"I intended to tell you everything as soon as we met to-day. Do not look cross, uncle. There is nothing wrong, I assure you. You see I have loved Bessie ever since she was ten years old."

"That is a lover's imagination."

"No. The very day I came here you showed me a picture of Bessie which you had just received. It is in the drawer of your desk now. Every few months you received a fresh one, and sooner or later you always showed them to me. I loved every picture better. You promised last year that when Bessie came from school I should meet her, and while I was eagerly looking forward to this joy you told me father was in trouble and that Bessie was going to Texas for the winter."

"She went immediately, as you know, on her return from Europe. There was no time to introduce you then, John."

"But I could not bear to think of Alphonse and James meeting her before I had any opportunity to say a word for myself. Alphonse, whether intentionally or not, has always stood between father and myself. I had left to him and James all of love and land there might be. They had my only sister, and I could not endure the thought of the dear little girl I loved going under their influence without a word for myself. Would you have liked it?"

"Perhaps I would not, John. I suppose all stratagems are lawful in love."

"Surely you are not angry, uncle. Am I not as worthy as Alphonse or James?"

"That was not then the question in any shape. Bessie's mother died of consumption, and I think Bessie ought to spend the winters South. A home in Texas is a great deal better than one in Florida. And there was the old home! It ought to have been mine, and I had an opportunity to make it Bessie's. This business will eventually be yours. How then

could you have spent half the year in Texas? But we will not discuss the business side of the question at present. Bessie has doubtless written you a letter. She wants you to take dinner with us, and I think you had better leave me alone to-day. I will meet you at my house about seven to-night."

"Let me go through the mail for you, uncle."

"No. I want to be alone. When some young man has just taken your daughter from you, John, you will remember this hour and understand 'why' I wish to be alone, with more business to do than I can well manage. Say nothing of our relationship to Bessie. It will come out naturally during the evening."

"But you are not angry, dear uncle?"

"Oh, no! No! It is all right."

Then John, a little reluctantly, rose and went away. He was so slow in leaving that Mr. Madison looked up a little impatiently. The young man could not understand his uncle's mood. Yet it was a very natural one. The loser does not care to discuss his loss; it is the winner who desires to talk over every detail of his success.

About noon, Mr. Madison had a thought which made him smile. He had been somber enough, but this thought let a cheery light in upon his gloomy reflections. He loved a pleasant joke, and he saw his way to giving Bessie, as he thought, a surprising *dénouement*. With twinkling eyes he drew a sheet of paper under his hand and wrote:

"MY DEAR LITTLE GIRL: I am going to bring my manager home with me. I have to-day decided to make him my partner, and I want to talk over affairs to-night at our leisure. Besides, I owe him this courtesy. I do not suppose we shall interfere

with your company. But, at any rate, I know my Bessie will gladly pleasure me, as I do her. I will be at home at seven. Have the best dinner possible ready for our guests.

“ Lovingly, FATHER.”

Bessie received this note in the middle of the afternoon. She frowned and pouted for a moment, but she was too good-natured not to accept the position cheerfully.

“ For, after all,” she thought, “ father gave way to my wishes very graciously—considering! And then it will be delightful to make myself charming to some one else in John’s presence. John can observe me better than when I am talking to him personally. Yes, indeed; a stranger will give me some excellent opportunities! And if John is just a little jealous, I can put that right afterward. When dinner is over, father will most likely take his new partner to the library; that will leave John and me alone, and there are really cases in which two are company and the third is a little in the way. I suppose it is all right!”

And she went about finishing her light household duties with a happy heart, anticipating nothing but pleasure, yet feeling adequate for any disagreeable element that might arise. Young as she was, she had the native capacity for management almost characteristic of the North American girl. She could give an order with a steady eye and a decided voice, and her servants were well aware that their disobedience would be followed by a prompt dismissal from a service exceedingly light and favorable. With silent promptness they followed her directions, and the rooms were in exquisite order when her father’s note arrived. She had written to John hours

before, and she was then ready to attend to her own adornment.

But none of her dinner dresses pleased her much. She turned them over with a little contempt and dissatisfaction. Suddenly, however, a bright idea relieved her perplexity, and she said softly to the little woman within her :

"I do not believe John knows a tea-gown from a dinner-gown, or if it does it will be easy enough to confuse him. I can say that dresses are thus and thus; just as other dresses are thus and thus and thus, and if he can tell how or why or wherefore dresses come to be thus and thus and thus he will prove himself to be a much smaller man than I take him to be. And the tea-gown I bought from Madame Francis is chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely."

She went with the thought to her wardrobe and carefully lifted and shook out the soft folds of the *crêpe de Chine*. The color was pale heliotrope, and it had a bodice zouave of heliotrope silk in a double point, covered with silver embroidery, to which a few flowers wrought in white satin gave a peculiarly rich effect. The over-sleeves were also in embroidered silk, edged with small silver tassels falling over the long sleeves of white *crêpe*.

And *crêpe de Chine* is such an ideal material that when Bessie had robed herself in this exquisite combination her beauty was really raised to the level of perfect loveliness. She had but to gather a few natural white and purple heliotrope with a fringe of maiden-hair fern, and as she tied them together John's card was brought to her.

"He has come half an hour too soon. That is pretty good. Now I will go and astonish him!"

She turned herself slowly round before the mirror, and with a smile of satisfaction went down-stairs. She was rather pitying John as she went.

"For, of course, a man cannot dress picturesquely unless he becomes an actor for the sake of picturesque dressing, and I would not wonder if many a man does go on the stage for that very reason," she reflected, as she softly stepped down the long stairway. "I wonder if John will like this dress. I wonder—"

Then she was in the drawing-room, and John was telling her how much he liked it and how lovely she looked, and he had not finished this explanation when the bell rang and Bessie said:

"That is father! He is bringing his partner to dinner with him. We must be nice to the gentleman, because it will please father."

"His partner! I did not know there was a partner in the firm."

"Father made him a 'partner' this afternoon. I had a note telling me so. I dare say he will be a very nice old gentleman."

"Old gentleman? Then you have never seen him?"

"He has never been at the house before; at least not when I was at home. He used only to be 'manager.'"

"Oh, he used to be manager!"

"Yes. John, I do hope father will like you very much."

"He may perhaps tolerate me for your sake. You will stand by me, Bessie?"

Bessie was assuring her lover of her loyalty, when she heard her father's footsteps. She listened for

those of his companion, but ere she could be sure they were wanting, Mr. Madison entered the room. Bessie had stepped from John's side to a table holding a bowl of lilies and pansies, and she appeared to be arranging them. In a moment's glance, she saw that her father was alone, and his kind smile quite reassured her. She advanced a few steps to meet him as he approached. John stood up, and she was just going to introduce him, when Mr. Madison said, with an air of perfect familiarity :

"Well, John, I wish I had let you help me with the mail. It was a pretty heavy one."

Bessie's glance went rapidly from one to the other. She understood the position at once. The whole incognito flashed upon her quick intelligence. But with an air of the most proper conventionality, she said :

"Father, I have the pleasure to introduce to you your old manager and your new partner, Mr. John Newton—Madison !"

Her charming air of triumph brought both men to their most humble apologies and explanations. Mr. Madison's were not long, nor yet very serious. His attempted little surprise was a natural one under the circumstances. He had simply pleased himself with the idea of showing Bessie that her brand-new lover was a very old and familiar acquaintance of his. And Bessie had felt her ability to add "*Madison*" to Mr. John Newton's name to be a full quittance.

John's explanations were of a more complicated and lengthy character. They required three hours of privacy to make them fully ; that is, it took John one hour and a half to tell Bessie how he had fallen in love with her photo when she was ten years old ;

to describe every subsequent photo ; the dresses in which she was taken ; the different effects that seal-skin toques and Tuscan broad-brims and sailor-hats had upon him ; how he longed to kiss her in her gymnasium suit ; and to walk with her in some jaunty street-costume ; and the agonies he suffered when he saw her in her skating-dress, and thought of some other person buckling on her skates and helping her to make figures on the ice. And as Mr. Madison had been accustomed to get three or four photographs every year, it really was wonderful John—or Jack, as Bessie now insisted on calling him—got half through these experiences in that time. In fact, he avowedly left a great many for future discussion ; for it was more important to describe the emotions which led him secretly to go with her to Galveston and woo her without revealing his identity. In his own mind he had gone over this explanation so often that he had his argument well prepared ; and, indeed, so well arranged that Bessie was delighted with the romance of her courtship.

As for the business part of the engagement, it did not come up at all for a hearing that night. Mr. Madison had his plans all ready, but the lovers were still but midway in their hopes and fears and feelings when the evening was found to be over. Bessie was then describing to Jack her loyalty to him under all the temptations to be disloyal which the handsome men of Texas offered her. And this was such a very interesting part of their mutual experiences to Jack that Bessie felt it ought to be finished as soon as possible. Consequently Jack asked for the following afternoon, and Mr. Madison thought, as a

clearly exceptional thing, the afternoon might be spared.

"Because, father," added Bessie, "I shall be sure to have a call from Amber in the morning. She sent me word she was sick to-day, but would see me in the morning ; so I shall have to put off Jack till the afternoon. I cannot help it, Jack."

Bessie, however, was very well pleased that Amber had not visited her that day. As she sat before her mirror, removing her beautiful garments, she talked to herself about the affair, nodding brightly to her satisfactory thoughts or shaking her pretty head at the points where dissent seemed proper.

"I am not glad that Amber was sick to-day. I am sorry, of course ; though I dare say Amber was putting on a little. But I *am* glad I did not see her until I was engaged—really engaged." And she held up her small white hand and watched the sparkle of the splendid diamonds which sealed the love-promise. "It is a simply gorgeous ring!" she exclaimed. "I do not believe Amber's engagement-ring was half so splendid. I noticed the rings on her hands when she was last here, and they were not—*very much*. Now she can offer Mr. Will Carter to some other girl. The idea of Amber thinking she could choose for me ! I rather think Bessie Madison can do her own marrying."

Then she rose, let her beautiful gown fall from her shoulders, and laid it carefully away in its proper folds. When this duty was fully done, she reverted again to her monologue :

"I must try and behave nicely, and not say disagreeable things. I do not want to do so—really, I do not—but Amber always does give me an itching

tongue. Let me remember what madame used to impress upon us every day and every hour of the day: how extremely improper was any allusion, however slight, which was calculated to give any uneasiness, however trivial, to any individual, how-disagreeable or foolish he might be. Poor madame! This was her great teaching. Now Amber used to be just a little spiteful, and she may be yet. One cannot expect wisdom to come with the putting-on of the marriage ring. How sleepy I am! I will not crimp my hair to-night. I can do it in the morning. I wonder if it would be wrong to miss my prayers to-night—just once—my engagement night, too! I suppose it would be wicked. I had better say them. If I do not, they will be sure to wake me up. Besides, I am so happy I ought to be very glad and grateful! Certainly I ought."

Then with a sweet intention she dismissed all worldly and selfish thoughts, and for a few pure minutes knelt reverently and spoke solemnly the holy formula she had learnt in her childhood. Let no one smile at such formulas, for while maidens keep their child-hearts they repeat them. And blessed are they to whom a good fortune gives a long space of such sinless repetitions! For when a woman's trials and a woman's pains come, then the lot of woman is to be met, then sorrow teaches to *pray*, then the form becomes the dead-letter, and the heart finds out the hidden speech which we call prayer. Oh, happy and innocent girls! "*Say your prayers*" with gladness of heart, for it will be in some extremity that you will learn how "*to pray*."



CHAPTER XI.

AMBER AS FRIEND AND WIFE.

But whenever a soft glance softer grows,
And the light hours dance to the trysting time,
And the secret is told "that no one knows."
Then, hey, for the ripple of laughing rhyme!
—*Dobell.*

There is a change in every hour's recall,
And the last cowslip in the fields we see
On the same day with the first corn-poppy.
Alas, for hourly change! Alas, for all
The loves that from his hand proud youth lets fall,
Even as the beads of a told rosary. —*Rossetti.*

In the morning Ambrosia came early. She made her health the excuse for not calling on the previous day; but women seldom deceive each other, and Bessie had a firm conviction that her cousin had been waiting for the becoming costume of black cloth and the Watteau coat to match, which she evidently was wearing for the first time that morning. She looked charming, but the charm was less owing to her garments than to the extreme neatness with which all her toilet was finished off. It was a rare completeness, better than beauty. Amber was satis-

factory at all points. It was a pleasure to look at her well-arranged hair, her figure, her hands, feet, dress, all remarkable for a finish, owing more to a cultivated talent than to a natural neat-handedness.

"She came in with less effusiveness and more dignity than she had ever before assumed with Bessie, and Bessie met the mood with a contradictory familiarity.

"I am so glad to see you, Amber!"

"And how well you look, Bessie! And what do you think of Texas?"

"It is a lovely country. I wish you could see its wide prairies, its woods and rivers. Nature in Texas is on such a grand scale."

"I have heard that. Would it not be nice if we could have it divided into sections and distributed about the other States? I dare say New York would make a lordly bid for a section of rolling prairie."

"Oh, indeed! The Texans would not spare a square foot of their State. But I am glad to be back in New York, though I expect to go away again in May. Father is to travel with me this time. We shall not return until November."

"You weary me with the thought of another journey. Sleeping and restaurant cars have given such an air of comfortable vulgarity to travel."

"But you took a long European marriage trip, Amber."

"People only expect to do that kind of thing once in a lifetime. I was awfully tired of railways and electric-lighted hotels. I think if I were a Dante of the present day I should depict my enemies in a perpetual round of tours—in purgatory. How did you like your Texan relatives?"

"Very much. Uncle Sam Madison is a fine gentleman; Cousin Alphonse is like him; and Cousin James is such a very superior young man that he is a source of constant gratification to himself."

"And, naturally, of constant aggravation to less superior mortals?"

"Yes. And yet he is going to marry a nice girl with lots of land and money. James is clever, no doubt. He writes poetry, and I wish you could see the reams of paper he spills himself over."

"I suppose some nice girls like that kind of a man; just as others like photographs of really fine works of art."

"Cousin Louisa is very handsome. She is to spend next winter in New York with me. She has fine eyes and hair and a captivating carriage and manner."

"Then she will 'take.' With good eyes and hair and a captivating carriage and manner, any girl is irresistible. You ought to be grateful for such presentable relatives—relatives rarely are sources of pride and pleasure."

"I should like my relatives under any circumstances, just because they are mine."

"That is a comfortable thing, because relatives are given, and must be taken as found. We can choose our friends. But if you only think of it, Bessie, how very few people would like to put all their relatives on their list of friends. I am sure I would not. I suppose a good many Texan lovers will follow you to New York?"

"Not one."

"That is strange. Really you must have lovers in order to enjoy life. I should like to give you a small dinner-party next Thursday. Will Carter will be

present, of course, and young Mortimer Banks. Either of them would make you a suitable husband. Dinner at eight. The doctor cannot get home before. You will come, Bessie?"

"If *Jack* is willing."

"Jack! Now, pray, who is 'Jack?'"

"My cousin, Jack Madison. I am engaged to him. I tell you because I do not want Will Carter or Mortimer Banks to put on airs to me. I am not going to try to conquer either of them."

"Then there is another cousin! And you are going to marry him? Is your father willing? Or is there some delightful romance about the love affair? You can trust me for anything in such a case, Bessie."

"Father has known Jack for nine years."

"I never heard tell of such a thing."

"He sent him to college."

"Bessie!"

"And he has been in business with father for nearly seven years."

"You take my breath away."

"And Jack has loved me ever since I was ten years old."

"Don't romance too much, Bessie."

"It is a stubborn fact. Jack will swear to it if you wish."

Then Bessie told Ambrosia the story of her wooing and told it very prettily. It was really a little city idyl, and Ambrosia listened, with a tinge of annoyance to it. Bessie—young, beautiful and wealthy—had been quite an item in her social considerations, and she had a private conviction that she had intended being very kind to her unmarried cousin. But she tried to feel sympathetic, and at any rate it

was easy to be interested and to show that interest in an excited catechism.

"You really did not know it was your cousin when you met him on the Texas steamer?"

"I had never even heard this cousin named. I supposed him to be simply Mr. John Newton."

"And your father did not know he had gone South with you?"

"Father thought Jack had gone West with a friend."

"And you found out that John Newton was John Newton Madison by a photo?"

"I found him out by a photo, which his brother Alphonse showed me, quite incidentally."

"And then you showed this photo to your father?"

"Yes; and he recognized John."

"And then you had that pretty *dénouement* in your parlor! I declare it is a comic-opera idea, but quite refreshing, Bessie! I suppose you will buy your *trousseau* in Paris. Who will help you?"

"I do not like any one to help me shop. How can even two women be of one mind about a dress or cloak? But I will tell you one thing, Amber: You are wearing a beautiful costume this morning, a truly covetable dress. I do wonder how you manage to make all your skirts hang so wonderfully well?"

"I insist on having the gores in the under skirt precisely the same as those in the upper one. No *modiste* will cut them exactly alike, if you do not insist upon it. I am positively strict on this point. I shall ask Miss Radway for Thursday night. Do you remember her?"

"The lady who lectured at our school sometimes to us?"

"The same. She is going to be an old maid, I fear."

"It is not her fault. It is entirely owing to the bad taste of men that pretty girls become unlovely old maids."

"To be sure, Mr. Curtis admires her, and he would doubtless make her a good husband. Poor Ellen Radway!"

"Well, then, why 'poor' Ellen Radway?"

"Because he will never be her lover. Ellen is unselfish, clever, dutiful and reads Emerson and Ruskin. Men have a high opinion of such women, but they do not love them. Doctor Carter would never have married a too clever woman."

"Doctor Carter is only one man in a million of men, and I think men are pretty much what women make them."

"I am sure Doctor Carter could not be 'made' by any woman. He has an iron will."

"*Pshaw!* No woman attacks a man through his will. She throws a spell over his judgment, my dear."

"Well, I know one thing, if girls try to imitate the sweet womanly household angels of some of our novelists, they will never get married. The old-fashioned modest, virtuous girls are now left to the solitary enjoyment of their own virtues."

"Because, as Mrs. Poyser says, 'the women are made to match the men.' Even in Texas, it was the tailor-made, cigarette-smoking, fast-horse riding, tennis-court girl that was never without 'followers.' When I told father about Jack, I pointed out this kind of things to him, and he finally came to regard my engagement, before going into any society at all, as a very fortunate thing."

"Bessie! Do you really think that this little episode about Jack and the photos and Jack and the Texas trip is a genuine thing? I dare say your father planned the whole affair, with Jack as a fellow-conspirator. He showed Jack your photos and talked about you to him, and, of course, Jack had a sentimental adoration for the bits of cardboard and the lovely girl they represented. Then your father told him about the Texas trip, and there was a tacit understanding between them that Jack should have his chance for your heart and hand before his brothers. Naturally, your father would desire it; and I think his little plan was a very clever one."

"Oh, Amber! How can you be so cruel! You are just like those dreary children who pull their toys to pieces to see how they are made and what is in them!"

"My dear, it is only prudent to look at things on their probable as well as their poetic side."

"But you were in love with Doctor Carter, and there must have been a poetic side to your engagement."

"Certainly. But really I must go now. I have promised to lunch with Mrs. Montgomery McCarthey."

"Goodness! Gracious! Do you lunch with Mrs. Montgomery McCarthey, Amber?"

"Why not?"

"I thought they were so very *tip on top*. How did you get to know her?"

"Doctor Carter is her physician."

"And doctors enter families with a kind of private latch-key. They know all about a family—quite as much, I should say, as a confessor does."

"And Doctor Carter is as dumb as a confessional."

He never tells anything. He could be very entertaining, no doubt, if he chose."

"However, you must tell me all about the McCartheys. Is it not a fine thing to visit there?"

Ambrosia laughed heartily in a soft, genuine way. She laid her head back against the cushioned chair and thoroughly enjoyed some mirthful memory. Bessie was a little wounded.

"Why do you laugh, Amber?" she asked. "Am I absurd in any way?"

"No! No, Bessie! I had a sudden remembrance of something very funny about the McCartheys. At the beginning of this season, as we were at breakfast one morning, the doctor read aloud from the daily paper this notice:

"'Mr. Montgomery McCarthey, Mrs. Montgomery McCarthey and Miss Melita McCarthey have arrived in New York for the season.'

"It seemed to strike Will in the most ridiculous way, and he laughed so immoderately that the doctor asked him for an explanation. Will said the notice reminded him in a moment of Mike Sullivan's account of a great Crimean battle. Do you know what I mean, Bessie?"

"Of course not. I never even heard of Mike Sullivan. Was he a great general?"

"This was how Mike Sullivan described the battle: 'So the commander-in-chief rides up, as the army stood in line of battle, and he calls out: "Is Mike Sullivan in the ranks?" "I am, general," says I, stepping forward. "Then let the engagement commence," says he.' Will told this story with all the impudence of the Irish brogue, and then added: 'Mr. Montgomery McCarthey and Mrs. Mont-

gomery McCarthey and Miss Melita McCarthey have arrived in New York for the season. Capital! *Let the season commence!* I never laughed so heartily in my life! Will has a charming way of saying such things—so comical and yet not a bit ill-natured. There was no occasion, for we were invited to the ball with which the McCartheys opened the season."

"Did you go?"

"Yes. It was a very fine affair. I think it really did open the season."

"What did you wear?"

"A dress made for me in Paris a few weeks previously. The train is of amber velvet, lined with amethyst satin and trimmed with Venetian point. The dress of white brocade has small sprigs of gold and amethyst, and the slippers are of white satin embroidered in gold."

"Pointed toes, of course?"

"Very pointed. I certainly suffer from pointed toes; but, oh, how hideous square ones are!"

"You must have looked lovely in white and gold and amethyst. You must have looked like an *édition de luxe* of a book of poems. I never was at a real ball. I should like to be invited to one."

"You miss little, Bessie. It is only a flutter of ladies all in a glitter with jewels, trailing their rustling garments after them. Some are peacocking proudly, with their chins in the air; others are perhaps gently and indolently quiet, like children in their Sunday clothes, trying to be as nice as they are. The usual way with most people is to be taking themselves at a high valuation and their neighbors at a low one. All the dresses are alike fashion-

able. There is the same twittering conversation and the same abundance of diamonds."

"It sounds very nice, Amber."

"Now I must go, for you know I have a large household on my hands. And a house will not take care of itself; and servants will not work spontaneously; and dinners will not come without ordering; though I declare some men have a general idea that things are so arranged. On Thursday, then, I shall expect you and Jack, to whom I will send an invitation. It will, of course, be only a very quiet little dinner—in fact, a simple family party, being in mourning."

"Of course. Poor Uncle Ambrose!"

"It was a great release for him, Bessie. The loss is ours."

"I understand that."

"On Thursday, then—if convenient."

"It will be so, I am sure."

"Then good-bye, dear, for the present."

A slight shadow settled on Bessie's face when she was left alone. She sat down and dropped her hands on her knees and her eyes upon her hands. Her young heart was troubled. What if Amber's suggestion was true and her pretty romance turned out to be a carefully laid plot? Amber's reasoning was at least plausible and possible. She felt that if things were according to Amber, nothing would ever again be quite the same to her. She had half an hour of genuine suffering; then in a moment her face brightened, and she nodded her head emphatically to the thought which had dispelled her anxiety.

"The straight way to anything is the best way. I will ask father and John if Amber's suggestion has

any truth in it. If they say: 'No,' that is the end of the matter. I will believe father and John against the whole world, if it was necessary."

She made this declaration with some temper, and then went impulsively to her piano and began to play—at first, rapid, rattling melodies, and then, as the tide of annoyance ran backward, sweet little love-ditties that she was practicing solely for Jack's benefit. One of these had come to her by mail at the New Year, and she now was sure that Jack had sent it to her. At the time, she had given her father credit for the remembrance, because she then imagined Jack to be in Mexico; but now she had hunted it from among her loose music and began to study its pretty words and melodious measure.

"It is such a pretty New Year's song," she said, "and it was kind in Jack to think of it." And she began to sing with that frank satisfaction which a taking melody imparts:

"If I could find the Little Year,
The Happy Year, the glad New Year—
If I could find him setting forth
To seek the ancient track;
I'd bring him here, the Little Year,
Like a peddler with his pack.

"And all of golden brightness,
And nothing dull or black,
And all that heart could fancy,
And all that heart could lack,
Should be your share of the peddler's ware,
When he undid his pack."

And the song took her captive, and she went about all day with it on the tip of her tongue; and when

her father came home she challenged him with sending her the wish for—

“ All the golden brightness,
And nothing dull or black,
And all that heart could fancy,
And all that heart could lack—”

and found him so patently innocent that she was able definitely to accuse Jack of the musical New Year's greeting, and to confessedly find him the right person.

Perhaps Ambrosia really did not intend to spoil her cousin's love-dream. She was not sure of her motive when she examined it. She could only say :

“ It was a pity to undeceive her. But, of course, her father knew all about it. Nobody would believe differently, and it would have been too absurd if she had told such a story to any one but me. And she was so offensively conceited about ‘ Jack,’ and needed to have a little of her sail taken in, I am sure. People's courting experiences ought not to be told ; but then, as *Punch* says, “ Ought ” stands for “ nothing. ” ” ”

Yet, in spite of this decided opinion, Ambrosia at once repeated her cousin's romance to Will Carter. The night was a very stormy one, and Will came into the drawing-room before dinner and found Ambrosia sitting there in a very dissatisfied temper. She told him the story in a dull, monotonous manner, and asked in conclusion :

“ Can you imagine a New York girl being such a little fool as to believe in an arrangement so particularly transparent ? ”

“ Yes, I can. There are girls in New York who

tarry in Arcadia willingly, and who have no desire to shake the last apple off the tree of knowledge—sweet, guileless maidens, who believe every word their fathers and mothers and lovers say. I wish with all my heart I could find one who would listen to me. I am sure I would believe anything improbable she chose to tell me.”

There was a long pause, and both Will and Ambrosia looked silently into the fire. Presently Ambrosia said in a weary voice:

“It is long after dinner-time. I suppose Robert is not coming home to dinner. It is very cruel of him.”

“Robert is so busy, Amber. I wish I could make you understand how much he has to do.”

“He need not do so much.”

“One engagement leads to another—in fact, demands another. He must attend to all or give up all. I advertised to-day for an assistant for him.”

“Will that make any difference?”

“Amber, my dear sister, you must not permit yourself to say such things, because saying them might in time really influence you, and if there is one thing sure in this world it is that Robert Carter loves his wife beyond all doubt or dispute.”

“Very fine! Why, then, does he so seldom show himself with his wife? People are beginning to think it very queer.”

“Only very silly people could have such a thought. It would be far queerer, if Robert Carter, because he had married a wife, was to neglect his profession and give up the investigations which are making him both famous and rich. You would not wish him to do that, would you, Amber?”

"I wish him to pay a little more attention to me. I have been three nights alone this week."

"Last night Robert was with us, and you hardly opened your lips. You were reading a novel."

"Robert was making notes out of a book. Of course, you take Robert's part. Once you promised you would always take mine."

"Are your 'parts' different? Oh, no! Oh, no!"

"I think we will have dinner. Why should two be kept waiting for one?"

When dinner was nearly over Robert came in. He looked weary and strangely excited, and he said with enthusiasm:

"I have been detained by a very remarkable operation—one I have wished to see performed all my life. It was most interesting and successful."

Ambrosia smiled and turned to Will.

"Can you imagine," she said, "any one wishing to see a surgical operation even when he was on his mother's knee or perhaps flying a kite."

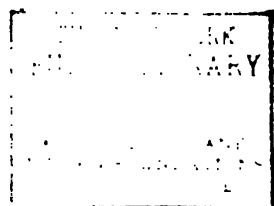
"Pardon, Amber! I have as usual, under emotion, exaggerated. I mean all my *professional* life."

"Which is, however, *all* your life. So that you spoke without any exaggeration after all, my dear."

Perhaps it was the tone of her voice that imparted an air of sarcasm or contempt to her words; perhaps it was the humps on the shoulders of her dress which gave her the look of depreciating everything said, by imparting the idea of a perpetual shrug. But in any case the effect was the same. The light died out of the doctor's face, he became reserved and eat his dinner in silence, and when the meal was over, he went to his study to write down more elaborately the notes he had taken.



"I HAVE BEEN DETAINED BY A VERY REMARKABLE OPERATION."—See Chapter XI.



Will had left the room previously, hoping that if the husband and wife were entirely alone they might get into accord. Will had at last discovered that the first year of marriage is a difficult situation. Husband and wife have each other's "ways" to discover, and to duly "allow for," in order that they may either agree or else "agree to differ." And suddenly this night the idea came to Will that this process of assimilation would proceed better without any outside influence.

"I am always interfering either with their quarrels or their reconciliations," he thought. "As soon as the assistant is found I will go to Europe for a few months. Robert does not need me now. Even when he is 'out' with Amber he prefers to be alone. And I am often in Amber's way, too. I can feel it. If she had more solitude she might encourage Robert's company."

"Yet, after he had smoked his cigar, he went down to the drawing-room. He was unhappy about this couple, who really loved each other, and ought to be happy and were not. He wished to find them sitting together, laughing and chatting. Bessie's love affair was to disclose, and he hoped that during the after-dinner interval its discussion would make peace. But the room was silent and forlorn-looking. The fire on the hearth had burned down. The lights had been purposely lowered, and Ambrosia was lying on a sofa, pallid with weeping and suffering from nervous headache. Will felt angry, and it is easy to be angry with the absent. At once he was certain that Robert was to blame.

"Where is Robert, Amber dear?" he asked.

"Gone to his study as usual," she answered in a

faint voice, full of the inflections of physical pain.

"And you are ill? It is too bad to leave you alone!"

"He had that 'case' to elaborate. I am nothing to a 'case!' Will, you are always good to me. Am I tiresome and cross? Tell me truly."

"You are the loveliest and kindest of sisters. You have never said a cross word to me, and as for being 'tiresome,' it is the most ridiculous of libels."

"Robert finds me so," and she began to sob with a passion that came hot from her heart and made Will's throb sympathetically.

"Robert means nothing of the kind. He is cross to-night. He ought to be ashamed of himself, and I shall tell him so."

Then he rang for Amber's maid and persuaded her to go to bed, and promised, with a very serious intention, to plead her cause for her.

He went straight to his brother. The door of his study was locked, and Robert opened it with some impatience.

"What do you want, Will? It is so late now I hoped to be let alone and find some peace to do my writing."

"Your writing! One would think, Robert, you had married an ink-stand!"

"I wish to goodness I had!"

"Robert, I feel angry with you to-night. Put down your pen and listen to me. You are loved by the brightest and most beautiful of women, and you treat her shamefully. Yes, sir! You treat her shamefully! I have just found her alone in the

drawing-room, suffering terribly with nervous headache. It is not right. Indeed it is not."

"She ought not to cry. She knows crying gives her a headache. Besides which, tears drench her moral fiber into a most provoking limpness. I could not trust myself with a crying woman."

"She wanted to talk to you to-night. I noticed how prettily she had dressed herself. She was so anxious about dinner being well cooked, so eager for you to be on time. She had been to Bessie Madison's, and had a very strange and pretty story to tell you about her cousin's engagement. She was counting the minutes of the last hour for your coming, listening so nervously for your step and ring that she could not speak; and, whether you know it or not, it is provoking, it is destructive of her happiness, to have all her pleasant plans and intentions swept away for a 'case.' And I tell you frankly, Robert, you have a confoundedly cold, professional way of assuming 'cases' to be the most important thing in life."

"Before I was married, Will, you never found them uninteresting."

"My dear fellow, you never asked me, and I was too polite to tell you the truth. Sometimes I found them very much of a bore."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, I did. Outsiders do not usually feel any interest in those parts of the body to which you give Latin names."

"A wife ought to feel some interest in her husband's work."

"A husband ought to feel some interest in his wife's work. Why do you leave Amber so

much alone? No woman could be more interesting."

"Interesting! Yes. But I want some solitude. Will, it is an awful thing for two human beings to be always close together. The most dreadful thing about marriage is that it gives another a claim to share every hour of your life. You can talk for hours, Will, about the physical evils of overcrowding. I tell you, Will, the mental and spiritual evils of overcrowding are infinitely worse. Now go away and leave me to attend to my own affairs."

"I am going to Europe for six months. You have too long soothed your sense of obligation to Amber by thinking: 'Oh, Will is there! Will can look after her!' Now, as regards Amber's social requirements, I cannot take your place, and I will not even if I can. I have noticed you, lately. In society you are pleasant enough, but at your own fireside you are a dumb dog. That is not right."

"If you have noticed my faults so closely, perhaps you have also seen some faults in my wife?"

"Robert, there is a time to wink and a time to see. Amber is in a physical condition which ought to blind you to her faults. You ought to show her many little attentions you forget. You ought to look over little irritations which you resent. If a sick wife speaks two words, you should take one and leave the other."

"Bachelors always know how to manage wives, Will. I used to think I did. Get married, Brother Will. Marriage opens the eyes of the blind bachelor."

"Amber loves you. Love ought to cover a multitude of faults. She expected to be loved in return,

to be petted, to be made much of. Women marry for that very reason."

"Bachelor wisdom again, Will. A woman marries, first of all, that she may become her own mistress. The rest follows. She has immediately every right—and a great many wrongs. Her poor husband has neither one nor the other. He may not even have an hour or two, to write up one of the most important surgical cases that has ever occurred."

"What is the good of talking, Robert? Actions speak louder. Go to Amber and kiss her good night. Now, Robert, you need not mix valerian or any other soothing herb. Go kiss your wife's tears away; that is the best medicine for her."

With this prescription for domestic peace, Will went. He was not dissatisfied with his management of Amber's case. He perceived that he had at least made it impossible for Robert to resume his writing, he had seen him stretch out his hand to the medicine chest, and he knew that, after a shorter or longer period, the recreant husband would seek his wife's presence, and that Amber with the culprit in this attitude might be safely left to manage her own defense.

But his heart ached for the fair hopes he had seen bloom so brightly and wither so soon. He walked listlessly from window to window; he took up a book and put it down; he lifted Amber's dropped work; he gazed forward, and his eyes met the pictured face of his dead sister. Then he went to his organ, and drew out the stops with a slow and noiseless hand, and the music softly penetrated the room. And by and by his voice melted into it, and Robert, passing the door on his penitential visit to

his wife, stopped a few moments to listen to the melodiously solemn question Will was asking :

“ Who will salute me *There* ?
Who will come forth to greet ?
What angel on the golden stair,
Will give me ‘ welcome ’ sweet ? ”

After all, what was there in life half so precious as love ? Robert knew what memories of love that had been and that had gone away forever were stirring his brother's heart as he sang. A sort of terror about Amber smote him. With all her provoking faults, how could he bear to lose her ? If Will's music had been the result of some well-considered plan to soften Robert's heart and stir into life his tenderest feelings, it would have been the best thing possible. Yet the song was only a personal consolation, and Will had not even a suspicion that Robert had heard and responded to the memories it evoked. So it is that we often mount the highest when we do not know where we are going. So it is often just the little things that are the great things in a man's or a woman's destiny.

The sweet old song had its mission, and fulfilled it. For Robert was but half subdued when it spoke to him. He was, indeed, on his way to Amber, but his intentions were not purely conciliatory. He meant to “ make it up ” with her, but he also meant to reason with her unreasonableness, and teach her how unjustifiable and selfish her expectations were. After the song, he put himself out of consideration. He forgot that he had felt wronged and slighted. He felt only that he had been thoughtless and cruel.

He hurried his steps to her bedside. He kissed open the dear eyes closed with nervous suffering.

Without many words, he whispered his confession and took his pardon from her lips. Then what a joy it was to make his skill minister to her relief ; to hover around her ; to smooth the long, bright, loosened hair ; to watch the smiles come back to her lip, the sense of rest and peace to the troubled face, and to hear her gradually begin to talk ! In an hour she was telling him Bessie's story, and making him feel so happy that he gladly forgot there was such a thing as a "case" in the whole wide world.

"And of all the conceited little mortals you ever saw, Robert, my cousin Bessie Madison is chief," was Amber's commentary on the position. "Jack's infatuated estimate of her beauty and excellencies has turned her head. She is charmingly certain of herself at all points. She knows everything about everything, and she enjoys the conviction that she is always right and always must be right, and that every one who doubts her always being right is either jealous of her advantages or envious of her romantic, handsome lover."

There are very few men who do not enjoy these womanly estimates of their dearest friends, and Robert asked, with a sufficient interest :

"Is this Jack Madison really so handsome?"

Amber made a little scornful "mouth" ere she answered :

"I saw a photo of him. The face is good enough ; but will you try to imagine a man, however handsome, dressed in light trousers and a dark vest and coat?"

"I positively refuse to set my imagination such a task," answered the doctor.

"Of course a man's legs ought to match his body,"

continued Amber, with the air of an authority. "Jack Madison really seemed to be cut in two; and I am sure, between the light half and the dark half, he was robbed of an inch in height. Why, Robert, even your high-bred air and dignified carriage could not stand such a—separation!"

The doctor first took to his heart Amber's glance of satisfied pride in his appearance, and then hastened to indorse her opinion. He was certain he always must have had an instinctive disapproval of such extremes, and Will had also. If ever Will had worn a light-and-dark combination, Robert knew it would have hurt his sense of the fitness of things, and so been fixed in his memory.

"Bessie will be here to dinner on Thursday next, Robert; and I do hope you will try to be at home early, dear, and do be at my side. I do not want Bessie Madison to believe she is the only woman in the world who has a lover."

Robert promised all she asked. He forgot at that hour that he was a surgeon. He only knew that he was a husband, sitting by the side and holding the hand of the dearest wife and the loveliest woman in the world.



CHAPTER XII.

PERTAINING TO WOMEN.

We school our manners, act our parts—
But he who sees us through and through,
Knows that the bent of both our hearts
Was to be gentle, tranquil, true.

* * * *

And we whose ways were unlike here,
May then more neighboring courses ply;
May to each other be brought near,
And greet across eternity. —*Matthew Arnold.*

One of the most pitiable memories in life is the number of hours we have willfully and wantonly made miserable. Blessed are the men and women who do not destroy their own share of happiness! Yet all of us can look backward and remember days that might have been full of pleasure that were full of heartache—heartache that a few words spoken or unspoken would have prevented. Had Ambrosia said one cheery, welcoming word to the belated husband, she would have found it easy to say more kind words. Then she would have expressed interest in what interested him, and they would, in all probability, have spent the evening together in delightful conversation.

In such case Ambrosia would have had no tears and no nervous headache in the lonely, dim drawing-room, and Robert no burning sense of wrong and indifference in the lonely study. True, there had been the reconciliation, but if Ambrosia had cared to consider the feelings entering into this paroxysm of injured love she would not have felt that she had had any triumph. In most natures the sense of injury is deeper than the sense of reconciliation. "After all I was right!" "I was foolish to give in," is often the last thought, even where there has been submission and apology. A little offense or a little disappointment passed over, what a victory it is! What pleasure and rest it brings! What a sense of self-respect! Even if it should be unsuccessful it imparts a personal consolation. It is as blessed to *give in* as to *give away*. Ambrosia had made a mistake, and she thought she had gained a victory.

Mr. Madison was older and wiser than Ambrosia, and he avoided the mistake and won the victory. His first feeling on entering his drawing-room that night had been one of jealous annoyance. The sight of Jack's conscious happiness was instantly offensive. Jack was sitting by Bessie's side, and had the air of being the sole possessor of the lovely girl, who, in heliotrope *crêpe* and silver tassels, leaned lovingly toward him. "This is too much!" "I think I have some rights!" "I am not going to be second in my own house!" A crowd of such thoughts pressed one after the other upon his heart. They affected his greeting of the lovers. He spoke coldly and he could not help it. He saw Jack rise in an embarrassed manner. He saw Bessie half close her eyes

and look curiously at him. He felt that he had the power to make every one alike miserable.

But he did not do it. By a great self-denial he arrested himself, and determined to be the promoter of pleasure. He turned back and kissed Bessie and gave Jack's hand a grip in passing, and then slipped into Jack's place and drew Bessie down to his side. He made a joke of his little plan to get the better of Jack; and Bessie, being one of those women who read men's hearts easily, said her father had fairly won her, and all evening she carried out the idea; she sat by his side and put Jack back to a secondary place.

So at last the father could not be ungenerous. After dinner, he placed Bessie between Jack and himself, and began to talk of the Texan home and of what was to be done to preserve it.

Then Bessie gave her decided opinion about living in Texas. She said it was an impossibility for her to do so. It was too far from New York. The State was a big State, but not big enough for her and James Madison. She had felt snubbed all the time she was there. James, after his marriage, would doubtless grow still wiser and greater, and she did not like to be made to feel as if she was a grasshopper in his sight.

"But the house will then be your house, Bessie. Nobody could snub you in your own house. And I think you ought to have a winter residence," urged Mr. Madison.

"I do not like the house, father. I want a winter house with all the modern improvements. And, as for 'snubbing,' James Madison would snub the apostles if they did not wear their gowns and miters.

Now, Alphonse does like the house, and he loves dearly a beautiful girl, called Margaret Blair. I *almost* promised Alphonse I would arrange things comfortably for him and Margaret."

"But Jack ought to come first. The house should be Jack's!"

"Jack does not want it."

"Jack has surely some respect for his ancestor, who fought for the land and built the house?"

"Of course, father, Jack respects his ancestor. But we do not require to live in Texas, as a mark of respect for him. Besides, Jack's ancestor ought to have built a much nicer house to go with that dukedom of land. Alphonse has not one aptitude for money-making. He could not even make money by marrying it, as James is going to do. And Jack—God bless him!—father, you have taught Jack how to earn his own bread. I do not want to live off my ancestors. I want Jack to make my living. Let Alphonse and Margaret have the house in reversion. Alphonse and Uncle Sam will preserve for another generation the traditional Southern gentleman; and I think both they and Louisa will be glad to be finally rid of me. Margaret will suit them; she is conservative and usual. I frightened all the family a little—except Jack."

Jack endorsed Bessie's views. He did not wish to leave New York. He liked his business life. He had faith in Bessie and in himself, and he wished Mr. Madison to release the Texas property in favor of Alphonse and Alphonse's children, as the ultimate possessors of the estate. Mainly this point was conceded, and Bessie's father did not think it necessary to tell the lovers that he had secured for

them a tract of rich bottom land, which in any reverse of fortune would be a fortune saved. Without this knowledge, they were pleased enough with the words of gratitude Alphonse and Margaret sent and with the news that they would, after all, be married before the irreproachable James.

There had been a fixed resolve in Mr. Madison's mind that Bessie should not make any appearance in society that winter. But it was hardly possible to refuse her cousin's invitation ; and when all was considered, a dinner at Doctor Carter's was only a family dinner. In the meantime Bessie followed out her intentions regarding the decoration of her house. She went with her water-colors and pencils to the Astor Library very frequently, and in its pleasant stillness copied "bits of coloring" and "corners" and "interiors," besides making many pretty and suggestive notes.

Jack called for her on his way uptown, and if it was fine they walked Broadway together, often calling at Tiffany's to see what could be found there, to carry out their designs. There were, indeed, a hundred different interests to detain them, for they were busy home-making and as important and happy about it as two lovers could be. Yet in spite of her numerous occupations, Bessie found time to remember Ambrosia's little dinner-party. She felt that at this initial entertainment she must take an individual stand and not permit Mrs. Doctor Carter to treat her as a "bud" or a *débutante* or any other incomplete creature.

She had some ideas of her own even about dress, and she imbibed a great many more from the exquisite "Books of Costumes" in the Astor. Over

these gorgeous volumes she brooded a whole afternoon, and the result was an irrepressible exclamation of delighted amazement from her father and Jack. Ambrosia was able to suppress the exclamation, but Bessie saw it in her eyes and was satisfied. She was satisfied herself, as she took a final glance in Ambrosia's mirror. For her gown of silk corduroy of a golden-cream color, and gored to fit her girlish figure, was a thing for approval only. Its bodice was edged with folds of narrow gold; and its bretelles of cream and gold were bordered with small pink pompon roses. The result was wonderfully effective. It gave Ambrosia a little start of pleasure and surprise.

"However has such a child come to select the colors and the materials?" she wondered. "But, of course, the whole costume is madame's suggestion; it is madame's business to get out of her head and out of the clouds all the wonderful combinations possible."

Mr. Madison did not accompany his daughter.

"Two out of one family are enough," he said. "I have sent my regrets, and Jack will be exactly the escort for such a smart little lady."

The criticism was not too favorable. Ambrosia, who had in mind that unfortunate photo in which Jack's legs did not match his body, was thrown quite out of her decisions. Here, at least, was a relative whom she need not be ashamed to put upon her list of friends. She was so pleased with Jack that she took some pains to make him feel proud to call Mrs. Doctor Carter a cousin.

"On the whole, it was a very nice affair—not too much dinner and not too many people."

This was Bessie's first criticism the next morning.

It was a very wet morning, and when she came down at eleven o'clock she found her father sitting by the fire, with a pile of newspapers at his side.

She looked a little sleepy, and she had eschewed all fineries. A pink cashmere wrapper, with bits of tiny ruffles, was all she had felt equal to; and her hair was combed straight back from her face and tied in one long braid behind. But nothing could make Bessie look severe. Lots of little curls and tendrils had run away from the orders of the comb and the braiding; and Mr. Madison could not help a sigh of satisfaction in the school-girly-looking daughter that greeted him. She seemed so much more like his own Bessie than did the splendidly robed girl of the previous evening.

"Good morning, my little girl!" he cried, cheerily. "I have waited at home to see you."

"I am so glad, father! Have you had breakfast?"

"I was thinking about lunch. Do you know it is eleven o'clock?"

"Then, I will ring for my coffee and what-nots. And as I eat I will tell you about Amber's dinner. Put down the *Herald*, father. I will not talk against the *Herald*. It is too big a rival."

"There, now! All the papers are behind my back. What of the dinner?"

"A very nice affair; but I am sure I could manage a dinner better. The flowers were lovely, but I think to Mr. Will Carter belong the honor and glory of the floral arrangements."

"Did you see the doctor?"

"He was in evidence from first to last. I do not believe he left Amber's side. But he looked bored."

"Oh, Bessie!"

"He did, really, as if his heart was far away. Amber said something about his overwhelming duties at hospital and laboratory. Can you imagine a man's heart being in such disagreeable places? Yet I think it was."

"Who else was present?"

"Mr. Will Carter, of course. Will is delightful. I should not wonder if he adores Amber in a sisterly way. He is not handsome, and yet plenty of handsome men are not as charming. He is even rather bald, and he did not seem to mind it at all. You are bald, too, father, and you do not seem to mind it either. How brave men are! I admire their courage, and I wonder what sum of money a woman would take to exhibit herself without hair on her head!"

"Perhaps it is not as much courage as a kind of audacious candor. Men are naturally less inclined to personal deception than women are."

"I trust it will never be fashionable for women to be so audaciously candid. Will Carter was kind to me. Kind is just the word, but he talked mostly to Miss Radway. Miss Radway is so very clever. She used to lecture to us at school."

"I remember. About history?"

"'Social Duties' and 'Woman's Influence' and that kind of thing. Yes, and she read and explained 'Gibbon's Rise and Fall' to us. I did not understand her then."

"And now you know all about a woman's influence. Eh, Bessie?"

"I think I do. And as for the history of the 'Rise and Fall,' the history of everything that has a history is one of 'rise and fall.' I hope the day may

come when people will find some better excuse for meeting than a dinner. Eating with company is not as nice as it is to sip my coffee and cut my beef-steak and take my ease over it at my own fire-side."

"How was Amber looking?"

"Very handsome. She had on a lovely work of art in black, and if she would only dress her front hair better I should have no fault to find with her."

"What is the matter with her front hair?"

"It hangs down into her eyes and makes her look like a Skye terrier. But I suppose Amber would catch cold without her bang. She has worn it for years and years, so to speak."

"What of Mr. Montgomery Banks? He is very rich."

"The only thing he said directly to me was: 'Will you take an ice? I am going to.' I declined the ice, for it did not strike me as a joy and honor forever to eat an ice because he eat one."

"Then I suppose Jack was the greatest beau there?"

"Jack was the finest gentleman. The greatest beau was a certain Doctor St. Ange. He has become Doctor Carter's assistant in some 'ology' or other. I took a dislike to him."

"Why?"

"Just because I did. He is very elegant and very handsome, but I do not like him. And I never before saw hands that appeared cruel. His did. Yet they were beautiful hands—white, cold, graceful: but they looked wicked. I could not help thinking 'what a blow they could give.' I should say the man was physically a gentleman and morally a

scamp. That is what I heard some one say of Cousin James, and he reminded me of him."

"I thought it was too nice a distinction for you to make."

"I can feel when it applies, though. Yet what can we tell of people in a drawing-room? We were all well-dressed, and we all had the same mannerisms, and we all talked alike, and for practical purposes we all thought alike. No one said anything out of order but Miss Radway and Will Carter, and we listened and did not dare to approve. I do think Will Carter is good company. When he talked, I wanted him to go on talking. But the topic was unfortunate. We could not risk our reputations on it."

"What was the dreadful subject?"

"Woman's rights. Miss Radway began it. She was talking about woman-culprits having a right to a jury of women. Doctor Carter listened with polite coldness, and said he thought most women would prefer a jury of men. Doctor St. Ange said it would be a merciless law, because the cruelty of woman to woman would far outshine the inhumanity of man to man. Then Montgomery Banks posed and simpered and made some horrid little stale jokes about women, and put on such airs—and yet nobody kicked him."

"Perhaps every one, mentally, did so."

"Amber tried to turn the subject, but Will was perverse. He said everything that the great masters of ancient song taught us was, that woman had, must, shall and will have her own way. He said the 'Iliad' proved that neither men nor gods could stand against her. He said Thetis coaxed Jupiter,

and Juno outwitted him, and Pallas Athene fairly snapped her fingers at the Thunderer. He was beginning on the 'Odyssey,' when Amber politely rose and led the way to her private sitting-room. Amber is possessed of a correctly modern mind. She is always able to do the right thing at the right time. Miss Radway tried to resume the subject when we ladies were alone, but we had our dresses and dress-makers to discuss, and Woman's Rights of Suffrage did not seem interesting. I like Miss Radway, but I do wish she would not walk on tip-toes about women. The mantle of 'Woman's Rights' is a great deal too wide and too long for her. I think that is all that happened."

"What did Jack say?"

"Jack talked to me, mainly. I do not think his conversation would interest anybody else."

"And what do you think of Amber's house?"

"It is very fine, especially in Persian rugs and satin-wood cabinets. The one for her music had a Bartolozzi engraving. And oh, father, the mantles in oak! Well, they made me think of the far-back centuries, and of Mr. Orchardson's pictures. I shall imitate Amber in nothing. I liked the parquetry flooring and dados, but where does she get the servants to keep her fine wood-work polished? Amber says it improves with time. I wish *we* did!"

"We ought to do so."

"But we do not, and that is a fact. I wish I had not seen that Doctor St. Ange. I am afraid he is no angel."

"I would not trouble myself about the man. Amber is sufficient for herself."

"What made you think of Amber in connection with him?"

"Did I do so? I had no motive in it. I am now wondering about Doctor Carter's income. Amber's way of living must be trying to a slender income."

"Amber is not extravagant. There never was any need to tell Amber to go to the ant and consider its thrifty ways. Thrift is at the bottom of all her plans. She told me Will Carter always kept her in flowers. I wonder if she intends St. Ange to take Will's place as special attendant. Will is going to Europe on Saturday."

"It is not our affair, Bessie. Doctor Carter would not thank any one for speculating about his domestic arrangements."

"When a man brings into his domestic arrangement a St. Ange, you can no more help thinking of him than you can help thinking of the satin-wood cabinets or the Wedgewood service. Miss Radway, with her eyes closed to a slit, looked at Doctor Carter and then at Amber several times in such a peculiar manner. I saw her. She was wondering if they were suited to each other—if they were happy—or something of that kind."

"Nonsense! Miss Radway was considering some problem of the veracities or the eternities. A mere question of domestic happiness would not interest her."

"Yes, it would. She thinks she is strong-minded and carries a volume of Mill in her pocket, but at heart she is more sentimental than a school-girl. She was as interested as could be in Jack. I do not believe she liked St. Ange."

"Did Jack like him?"

"Oh, no! When I said St. Ange was horrid, Jack said so, too."

"Poor St. Ange! You must ask him here with the doctor and Amber."

"Indeed, I cannot. The house is all tossed up, and going to be more so every day. I told Amber we were moving out to let workmen in, and she got under the situation at once. I have already more to do than I can manage. Jack and I are making lists of things I had better buy in Europe. We have not got through the china list yet. Still I shall call at Doctor Carter's as often as I can. St. Ange interests me."

Her first call was with Jack, and being a formal and anticipated one, was as barren as such calls always are. A hurried "run in" on the following day discovered Amber in tears. She said it was because of a letter from "poor Clara," and she lifted, rather ostentatiously, a black-bordered letter lying on the table. Bessie did not disbelieve her, for a rather sad conversation on the circumstances of Mrs. Shepherd followed.

"Her mother has just died," said Amber, "and Clara has gone to Vermont to bring her father to Mayberry. It does seem hard for a beautiful woman to be tied with a sick old man at a desolate farm like Mayberry."

"The sick old man is her father; and I dare say she likes to make him happy and comfortable."

Then her eyes wandering round the room, she saw upon the piano a violin.

"Are you learning *that* instrument, Amber?" she asked, with a new interest.

"No."

"It is quite fashionable now, for ladies. Lena Desbrosses says: 'It makes a girl look so cunning.'"

"Yes. I have seen Lena look 'cunning,' and cuddle her head down to the wood thing in a very fascinating way."

"Does Mr. Will Carter play the violin with you? Or Doctor Carter?"

"Will plays the organ, nothing less. Doctor Carter is interested only in worms, invisible worms. The violin belongs to Doctor St. Ange."

"Really? Then St. Ange fiddles to your piano-playing?"

"'Fiddles?' What an expression, Bessie!"

"Viols. Is that better?"

"Any word you like. His violin goes well with some of my pieces. He performs with great feeling and with some skill, I think."

"'Performs?' Yes, 'performs'—that is the word. I am glad to know. I might have said 'fiddle' to Lena Desbrosses. What lovely little feet she has. Have you noticed them?"

"Yes. She has undoubtedly pretty feet, and to show them, she wears her dresses short in front and long behind, and, consequently, she is just the shape of a turkey. Some one ought to tell her how funny she looks. I cannot. Colonel Desbrosses is one of Doctor Carter's patients."

"And I cannot, for Lena is born to occupy a front seat in the best society circles, and I make a point of being civil to such people. I might have to sit among them. Jack has the faculty of money-making."

"Is Jack going with you to Europe?"

"No. Father is determined to have me undivided for six months. That is the bargain."

"In six months you will find another lover."

Those grand young Englishmen! So blonde, so strong, so handsome, so full of vitality!"

"I should compare them with Jack and find them wanting. Do you not think Jack very handsome?"

"Tastes differ. But I think he *has* a nice face."

"And a fine figure? Did you notice how erect he carries himself? All Texans have that up-head way in walking."

"Both his face and his figure are simply perfect. Nature deserves praise for producing both the one and the other."

"Amber, do not air your wit on poor Jack. You can throw a shaft or two at me. I can talk back to you."

"My dear Bessie, you are so sweetly innocent yet. Get married and you will know in three months more than nineteen years of unmarried life can teach you."

"One would think you had a grudge at marriage. Are you not very happy?"

"Very happy."

"I am sure of that. Doctor Carter is such a wonderful man. Every one talks about him. It must be lovely to be the wife of a truly great man."

"Very lovely."

"Jack is not a great man."

"You ought to be thankful."

"I am. If Jack was clever I should have to sympathize with things I did not at all comprehend, which would be a great bore. But when Jack says 'he has done a good stroke of business, or made ten thousand dollars,' I understand what that means very well. It would not bore me to talk it over with him. See?"

"Very clearly indeed."

A few days after this visit Bessie passed Amber and St. Ange. All were driving, and a smile and rapid uplifting of the eyes were all the greeting possible. But Bessie thought some more, and wondered some more, and finally mentioned the meeting to her father, who dismissed the information with an "indeed" so final that even Bessie did not care to talk against a word having such a perceptible "mind-your-own-business" tone.

The day preceding her sailing for Europe, Bessie expected Amber to call and take lunch with her. Amber had promised to do so, but she neither came nor sent any apology. Bessie was both anxious and curious, and about the middle of the afternoon she drove to the Carters. Mrs. Carter was sick, but in response to a message scribbled on her card, Bessie was admitted to her presence.

Doctor St. Ange left the room as Bessie entered it. Amber was on the sofa in her morning-gown. Her hair was loosened and she was still in that intermittent condition of occasional sobbing which indicates the subsidence of a storm of feeling. Indeed, her whole appearance showed excessive distress, and Bessie's sympathy brought on a fresh attack. Then Doctor St. Ange returned to the room and gave her a spoonful of some medicine and directed a maid to continue the gentle rubbing of her mistress's hands and feet. With a very grave face he retired again, and Amber explained that she had been suffering very much for several hours.

"But where is Doctor Carter? Have you not sent for him?"

"I do not want to see him. I cannot bear to see

him. If he should come in, I should have another attack, I am sure. He is so cruel—so cruel!"

Bessie was confounded.

"Why, whatever has the doctor done?" she asked.

"He wanted me to go this summer to some horrid little place close to New York. I have set my heart on Newport. All my important friends are going to Newport. He said some dreadful things, and my heart is nearly broken."

"Did you say dreadful things, also?"

"I suppose I did. I do not know. I was in such a state, I do not know what I said. I am sure I was not responsible. I was so ill—suffering—and he went away and sent Doctor St. Ange to attend to me. What a cruelty! What an indignity! I will never forgive it."

"I dare say he could not bear to see you in such a bad—I mean, suffering so much."

"Men are so brutal. I wish I had never married."

"Jack is not brutal. Jack would not be brutal under any circumstances. Nothing could make Jack brutal to a woman."

"Jack is like all the rest, and you will find it out."

"I shall find nothing wrong out, I am sure. I should not wonder if you had not been a little to blame. You always were hasty, Amber. Let me send for Doctor Carter, and do make it up with him. It must be awful to be 'out' with your own husband. No wonder you are ill and broken-hearted!"

"I would not humble to Doctor Carter for anything. Oh, Bessie, warn every girl you know against marrying old bachelors! They are so set in their horrid, selfish ways."

"Doctor Carter is a charming man, and I am sure

he idolizes you. Send for him at once. I would not see that Doctor St. Ange; he is horrid!"

Amber sighed but did not answer. Then she managed to take a cup of tea with Bessie and talk over her directions for a set of fine Belfast bed and table drapery—hand embroidered. Doctor St. Ange did not intrude upon the confidences, but when Bessie went away, she saw him sitting by a window in the corridor, reading. He rose and would have spoken, but Bessie bowed distantly and declined conversation with him. She had seen Amber in "tantrums" occasionally when they were school-fellows, and had learned from experience that they were more annoying to others than hurtful to herself.

However, there were a hundred other things to think of and to talk about, and Amber did not cause much curiosity in her cousin's family. Bessie knew her father would ignore the subject, and a certain delicate reserve about "things pertaining to women" made her withhold her confidence from Jack. And perhaps, after all, Amber knew her own business best, for she was at the steamer the next morning, in the highest spirits and looking charming in a costume of cloth and astrachan. Yesterday's pallor and air of suffering hopelessness were quite gone.

She reiterated her commissions and her good wishes, and with a delightful oblivion as to methods, she finally told Bessie that she had at last made up her mind to spend the summer in Newport. Doctor Carter, she said, had the offer of a cottage there, and Bessie must think of her as enjoying the sea breezes and such pleasant company as her condition of mourning permitted. Then came the bustle of leav-

ing and the crowding to the wharf; but the last thing Bessie saw was Doctor St. Ange assisting Amber into her carriage.

She had little opportunity to reflect upon the circumstance. There was a universal feeling on board that the gallant Cunarder was going to race the *City of Paris*, and even the ladies were much excited over the news. At first, Mr. Madison was grave and disinclined to approve, but when the open sea was gained and the race really in progress, he found his enthusiasm master his prudence, and before he was aware was warmly defending the sport.

"Were we not all—British and Americans—descendants of those who claimed the empire of the seas?" he asked. "If horse-racing was encouraged to improve the breed of horses, why not ocean-racing to encourage the build of steamers?"

"Besides," said another partisan, eagerly, "the great ocean highways belong to us. They are perfect 'courses' ready made; nothing but 'hazards' from beginning to end."

"And, pray, what rules would you have to govern the competitors?" timidly asked a listener.

"The steamers should be absolutely left to themselves," was the reply; "though, of course, at the start, proper authorities could see all left with fair play."

"And then?"

"Then we must hope that some or all of the entered vessels would turn up at the finish."

"Exactly!" cried another, enthusiastically. "The captain and sailors would think it great fun."

"And the owners of the ship?" asked the timid man.

"They could hedge themselves with insurances."

"And the passengers?"

"They would be delighted to lighten the voyage by making a perpetual race of it. Then there is the excitement of betting. It is likely enough that we may soon see the ocean odds quoted regularly in the sporting columns of the New York and Liverpool papers."

To this false but pleasant note the whole voyage was set, and the expected race lasted all the way. Bessie enjoyed it. She even began to say the practice ought to be carried out on the railways. If it was so delightful at sea, why not have it on land? Could anything be more thrilling than a couple of express trains shooting along on parallel lines, in derision of way trains and cross traffic? And thus arguing and joking, she watched at last the beautiful, low-lying shores of England appear. Then she frankly told her father that she liked to travel with him. It was so nice to be with some one who was not afraid, and who let her keep on deck if she wished, without regard to wind or weather.



CHAPTER XIII.

“WHO IS ST. ANGE?”

“Still from the fount of Joy’s delicious spring
Some bitter o’er the flowers its bubbling venom flings.”

“Man’s love is of a man’s life a thing apart;
It is a woman’s whole existence.”

“All who joy would win, must share it;
Happiness was born a twin.”

The means by which Ambrosia obtained her desire were not as evident as they appeared to be; and she would have been extremely mortified had she really been aware how little her success was due to her personal influence. Robert Carter had left his hysterical wife with a firm determination not to yield to her demand. He did not wish to go to Newport; it was too far away from his work; it was too gay to promise him any rest; it was an extravagance he was not inclined to sanction.

But what is a resolve when circumstances unlooked-for work against it? Within an hour after leaving Ambrosia he was visited by a wealthy patient who was going abroad for three months.

“And there is my house at Newport,” he said, “if

you care to occupy it, doctor. It is in perfect order, and the servants will remain. Go there from the middle of June until the middle of September. It will do you good, and I dare say we can easily balance accounts."

The offer was both a compliment and a bargain, and Doctor Carter accepted it. But when he told Ambrosia he had rented the Van Super cottage, its horses, carriages and servants, he did not think it necessary to state the particulars of the transaction. So Ambrosia was certain that her charms and personal power had obtained her this glory; and Robert did not undeceive her. Life, he thought, would doubtless afford him plenty of opportunities to demonstrate to his wife how insensible he could make himself to a passion as familiar as hysteria. The present case could go unchallenged.

The whole position was a mistake. It looked a small and natural one, but it had unapprehended proportions. It was a mistake to permit Ambrosia to suppose an unreasonable exhibition of excited feeling had induced her husband to submit to an unreasonable request. It was a mistake not to acquaint Ambrosia with the financial and friendly advantages which had induced the change of views. He had really accepted Newport to gratify his friend and patient more than to please his wife; but Ambrosia regarded the concession as a victory; and though she took her honors modestly, she had all the obvious condescensions and reservations of abstinent power.

This tacit deception awakened for the first time in the doctor's mind a cynical if not a contemptuous acceptance of his wife's efforts to please him. Am-

broisia had a genuine pleasure in his supposed submission to her desires. She endeavored to show this pleasure in every womanly way known to her. She was witty and pretty and conciliating and altogether charming. She did everything that could make her husband understand that she was grateful for the Newport concession. And Robert, almost unconsciously, had the feeling of a man who has paid a price for his wife's smiles and affection. He watched her and listened to her, and was cynical and critical.

She was enchanting, not because she loved him, but because he was going to pay her with Newport. The small, beautiful deceptions which love glorifies no longer led him a willing captive. He found himself considering his wife and her ways as a philosopher might investigate a subject full of interesting contradictions. He began to understand why men shrugged their shoulders with a "can't-be-helped" kind of tolerance at the mention of wives or women. A comic paper that he had always tossed contemptuously aside had now a meaning to him. He looked at its domestic pictures, and was not astounded at its great success any longer. He saw that they spoke for the married men of the community in that half-serious and half-comical vein which was the only possible protest against beings so much loved and so much disapproved.

But it was all a mistake. When a wife sinks to this level, she has fallen indeed. Ambrosia's beauty and charm were great, and she still held her husband by her personality; but that sweet bond which should have made them one in all matters of business, which should have made Ambrosia sympathize

with her husband's labors and studies, which should have made them equally interested in their home and all its domestic details—that sweet bond was slipped and loosened. And Ambrosia knew it not.

There is a certain fillip to life in all changes, and at first Robert Carter was interested by his new surroundings. No human being is without tidal fluctuations of some kind, and these in the doctor's nature set in the direction of a purely physical delight in drifting and resting. He permitted himself to escape, to flutter away, in that delicious torpor to which the sea disposes. He went into New York once a week, and looked at his letters, and left Doctor St. Ange to look after any stray patient there might be. And he had several of those foolish moods in which men are under a passing influence and disposed to contradict their deepest inclinations. He was living a life new to him, and he was for a moment, now and then, disposed to think it was the best life possible. The wisest men make such admissions one hour, only to deny them the next. For a great deal of what is called truth is truth relatively to time, place and person; it may be true for one person and not true for another person; true for one place and not true for another place; true at one time and not true at another time. In a month what had seemed so charming, so restful, lost all its charm and rest, and the doctor was ready to deny what he had averred a week previously. He had been weary; he was now refreshed. The arrears of nature were paid up, he was physically restored, and his mental energy returned.

Then both the semi-torpor and the social life displeased him. His heart turned to his work. Riding,

driving, dressing, dining, sailing, all alike were distasteful. Ambrosia had little time to give him; her blandishments were mainly used to induce him to be her escort to one house or another; her dresses and her callers used every moment. She had really to economize her time to portion it out in hours and minutes and divide them among yachters and tennis-players and dinner-givers. She was unwittingly serving a term at fashionable hard labor, and if she had been forced by necessity to work as constantly for her daily bread, she would have died in making her living.

A very short time sufficed to reveal this life in all its barbarous baldness to Robert Carter. Its noise and glitter and surface refinement were at once complete and unendurable. He was too active a man to philosophize about the things that did not please him, and too aware of the value of his own labors, to spend his days in speculating on the various ways in which various people think life worth living. He felt only that he must go back to his study and laboratory.

But he said nothing of this determination. He had come to the conclusion that it was better to avoid discussion with Ambrosia; their angles got into each other's way and provoked friction. And then with all his will he was no match for a lovely woman selfishly resolved to have whatever gave her honor or pleasure. For there is a wonderful power in pure, unadulterated selfishness: it has a bull-dog grip, when it fastens on any person or thing. Doctor Carter had come naturally enough to marital tactics when he determined one day to remain in New York and send Doctor St. Ange to Newport.

He went first to Tiffany's and bought an extravagant ring as a peace offering. St. Ange received it in charge with a letter explaining the dreadful condition of his business; the urgent need there was for his presence in the city; his disconsolate condition without his "dear, lovely wife;" and his promise to be in Newport the following Saturday. He only partially succeeded in satisfying Ambrosia. She passed intervals all the evening in holding up her hand and delighting her eyes with the sparkle of the gems and the beauty of the goldsmith's work, but she was not a woman to find gems an equivalent for love. Robert's desertion, though well accounted for, was something of a shock. It made her thoughtful, and she remained at home and wrote a long and loving letter to her husband.

She also wrote confidentially to Clara. If the doctor was to be mostly in New York, and St. Ange was to be much in Newport, she felt she ought to have some companion; and who could be more desirable every way than her step-mother? And doubtless she was very much in earnest and used potent arguments, for Clara answered her request in less than a week. The women loved each other. They met with that silent embrace that means so much, and that night St. Ange was at perfect liberty. He had neither to escort Ambrosia abroad nor to accompany her music nor to write her notes of invitation nor to make out lists of duties for the following day. He was rather glad of this pause in events. The advent of a friend so clear-eyed and self-contained as Clara was a complication he did not like.

It was a dull, warm, languid night, and Clara and Ambrosia sat just within the long, open windows

looking out into the dark garden. At the end of the garden was the sea. They could hear its long, mournful roll, and the sense of its gray vastness invaded the room in which they were sitting, thoughtful, silent and sympathetic. But at length Ambrosia began to talk—to talk of things having little interest for her, as was evident by the monotony of her voice.

"You have your father with you now, I hear, Clara. How glad you must be!"

"I am glad. And he is so much better in health. I could not else have left the farm."

"I have longed often to come to Mayberry and see you and him, but I have had so many hindrances and troubles."

"All women have the same lament, Amber. When did you hear from Bessie?"

"A week ago. Bessie is so fond of telling the world all about herself that she is a good correspondent. They were at Ambleside, 'doing the English lake district.' You know about the Texan Madisons, I suppose?"

"Yes. She is to marry the eldest, I hear."

"If you had not heard, it would have been the marvel. She tells every one 'her romance.' The youngest brother has just been married to a very rich girl, and they, too, are in Ambleside; also the only sister of the family, Miss Louisa Madison. Can you not imagine Bessie the active center of this family group? However, I care nothing about the Texans if they do not get Will Carter within their influence."

"Is Will going to Ambleside?"

"Yes. I was such a fool as to tell Bessie his route."

I wanted Will to know Bessie, but I did not want Will to meet Louisa Madison; and I know how readily Americans abroad get sentimental with other Americans abroad; and Bessie told me that Louisa was very beautiful. The first woman who pays Will Carter any attention will win him. It is my opinion Bessie will try to make a marriage between Will and her Cousin Louisa."

"I dare say she is thinking only of her own marriage."

"I know the probabilities and the possibilities, Clara; the lovely scenery, the beautiful twilights embalmed in jessamine, the moonlight nights by the lake shore, all the exquisite backgrounds close at hand. And Bessie transacts her love-making by United States mail at present. Also, she will be invulnerably cold to all lovers on her own account; and, therefore, she will be certain to meddle with some other person's destiny."

"But why Will Carter's? They will have many other friends and companions."

"Bessie will specially enjoy meddling with my friends. She said to me one day: 'You really ought to get Will Carter married, Amber. Both the brothers Carter are an unjustifiable proportion of good luck for one girl.' And I made a little boast—as any woman would—of Will's devotion to me as his sister; and then Bessie laughed a little. At that moment, I felt a presentiment of defeat in some way, and now I am sure of it. I had just been telling her about Will's intended trip, and hoping they would see each other in England, and so on, when she made the remark. I feel certain now, that at that moment she planned the meeting between Will and Louisa, and

the family party at the Salutation Inn, Ambleside."

"And you think the result will be—"

"A marriage at Grace Church before Christmas. But I shall feel awfully poor and lonely without Will. I wish I had made more of him. I wish I had asked him to stay with me this summer. Will has been a brother to me in every possible way."

"Have you heard lately from Tom?"

"I dread to see his letters. He is still in Chicago—going from bad to worse."

"What is he doing?"

"Playing billiards. I do not know of anything else. Robert is always cross when he sees his letters in the mail; but then, Robert is often cross about very little."

This was the subject to which both women had been tending in their hearts, and the other conversation was merely a way leading up to it—a womanly way, veiled and indirect. Two men would have lit their cigars and plunged at once into the matter of anxiety. Even now, Clara hesitated ere she said, calmly:

"Robert has so much to think about and to do. No wonder he is nervous."

"He is not nervous. He is cross. He is fonder of his studies than he is of me. He would rather be in his laboratory than in his home."

"That is a serious charge; and I think you are mistaken, Amber."

"He came here for three months; he was restless in three weeks. In a month, he has really deserted me."

"Do not say such a thing, Amber. A man is compelled to attend to his business. Bankers, mer-

chants, lawyers, doctors cannot take the seasons into consideration. Why, even some clergymen attend to their churches in the summer."

"If it was his patients, I would not mind so much; but his patients are rich people, and they are at their country homes or at Bar Harbor or in Europe or out at sea, yachting. It is simple study, trying to find out things, and writing, writing, writing! He is not even making money."

"My dear, he is making fame."

"Fame!" What good is fame? No man is great in America until he dies. While he is alive all men speak ill of him. And even when he is dead, what has he but a name? Ten letters is all our great Washington possesses."

"Doctor Carter has a nobler fame in view than any warrior deserves. He is working to preserve life, to avert suffering, to cure disease by discovering its cause."

"And who will give him 'thank you' for his labor? It is now the cheap and frugal fashion rather to hide or deny the obligation than to pay for it even by decent gratitude. And if Robert has a right to sacrifice himself, he has no right to offer me up also to the general good. I want to be loved. I do not want to be the wife of the great Doctor Carter."

"My dear Amber, you are in a very critical position. From just where you stand you can either make yourself a happy and honored woman or you can wreck two lives."

"I think it is a shame—"

"For once you must listen to me. It is your vanity as much as your love that is wounded. You knew when you married Robert how devoted he was to

the science of medicine. You said then you were proud of his reputation and loved him for it. He believed you, and has acted upon your words."

"People say things before they are married they do not really mean. Every one does. I thought I could make Robert devote himself entirely to me."

"And give up his profession altogether?"

"No—not exactly that. I do not mind him attending to his patients. They pay him for his time."

"I am afraid you are selfish, Amber. Suppose he said to you: 'I am quite willing you should have a splendid home and even occasionally entertain your friends in it, but I am not willing to have you go to the houses and entertainments of other people. You are my wife, and you ought to be satisfied with my society.'"

"That is a different thing."

"Not at all. The private pleasure of your home does not satisfy you. You wish also to exhibit your husband, your beauty and your rich costumes in other houses. The doctor's patients do not satisfy his thirst for medical knowledge. He wishes to investigate, to learn, to show himself in unknown departments of his profession. You ought to give as well as take a certain amount of freedom. If you would keep a man at your side, give him full liberty to roam. He will not then go beyond your influence."

"It is so easy to give good advice. And then there is this Doctor St. Ange."

"Yes—I see. Who is Doctor St. Ange?"

"He says he comes from New Orleans. He is Robert's assistant in surgical and laboratory work. Do you like him?"

"I think not. Why is he here?"

"He comes to see if I require anything ; to escort me to any entertainment ; to drive or sail with me ; to 'take Will's place,' as Robert says. He is not always here, but a three weeks' vacation in Newport is promised him, so I thought it best to have you at my side. The man is undoubtedly handsome ; and people imagine things and then tell their own imaginations."

"Charity thinketh no evil, Amber."

"The world thinks nothing else but evil. And we have to live in the world. One thing I notice about St. Ange—he gets such queer-looking letters. I mean untidy, careless letters, on poor paper. I wonder who his friends are."

"They may be dunning letters. I believe it is considered vulgar not to be in debt."

"Yes—and no. They are in a woman's writing. Robert says we have nothing to do with his letters ; but I am sure that the letters a man receives are quite as significant of his real character as those he writes. However, he is very handsome and elegant and a great favorite wherever he has been introduced. Mrs. Brandan says the girls rave about his beauty and his skill at tennis. He can handle a bat or an oar, and he can lead the german, and he plays the violin very well. Robert says he catches an idea as quickly as it is broached ; and yet the man is vulgar ; he is not refined clean through, as Will Carter is. But you will observe, Clara, and I am sure you will find out, what I cannot find words of the right degree to explain."

"It is nearing midnight, also ; and the day being finished, there is no medicine for it. To-morrow will bring its own opportunities."



CHAPTER XIV.

" IF WILL WERE ONLY HERE !"

To love and at the same time to be wise,
Is scarcely granted even to a god.

—*Publius Syrus.*

Love, thou knowest, is full of jealousy.

—*Shakespeare.*

How poor are they that have not patience !

—*Shakespeare.*

Everything has a good and a bad side, and Clara's visit was no exception to this general rule. It was a good thing, inasmuch as it placed the shield of impeccable propriety between Ambrosia and a world which is nothing if not vigilantly censorious. It was a bad thing, inasmuch as it gave Robert's conscience a comfortable excuse for longer delays in New York than he might otherwise have taken.

In the meantime, St. Ange was making for himself an enviable position. "Doctor Carter's assistant" had, to begin with, a professional respect, which naturally implied a certain social standing, and made an irreproachable foundation for the personal influence of the young man. This was soon very pronounced. The married ladies thought him so distinguished-looking and so obliging. The girls

adored his beauty and grace, his skill in all games, in music and in dancing. And he had the faculty of making each separate girl believe herself to be the sole object of his adoration. Certainly Doctor St. Ange was "the favorite" of the season; and Ambrosia watched his tactics and his successes with an interest singularly compounded of complaisance and contempt.

She could no longer complain of the character of his letters, which were now a numerous assortment of pale-tinted notes, delicately monogrammed and sealed with pretty devices. It was a sight to watch the reception of these perfumed precursors of dances, dinners and flirtations, to watch his ruthless-looking hands slowly cutting open the dainty envelopes with a silver paper-knife; his smiles full of ineffable conceit; his little shrugs and deprecations; his soft sighs of relief and the air of superior satisfaction with which he turned to his breakfast when the trial was over.

But, in spite of his many triumphs, he knew that he had failed in interesting Ambrosia, and for this reason they were paltry in his sight. Sometimes he thought she actually detested him. At other times, his vanity led him to believe that her heart was really his, that she was enduring a great struggle, but would finally lose the battle. This idea, nursed by his inordinate self-estimation and by daily little unavoidable circumstances, took possession of him. He permitted it, consciously enough, to color all his actions; and in this undefinable way Newport society received the impression that Doctor Carter and his wife were not sympathetic. If Clara had not been so constantly with her step-daughter, it would prob-

ably have received the next impression that Doctor St. Ange and Mrs. Carter were sympathetic.

There could have been no falser one. But Ambrosia was not happy, and she daily grew more weary of the monotony of a life of so-called "pleasure." If her husband had been constantly with her, she might have disagreed with him and felt him often to be tiresome and unkind; but life would have had a zest and savor it totally wanted without him. She had, one morning, a feeling of shock when she remembered how seldom and how short had been his late visits.

And society, even in its best phase, had not turned out to be the satisfactory thing she had anticipated. There were many women in it willing to sacrifice far more than she was, and consequently she gave too much and too little, and got hardly any of the returns desired. She thought of her own handsome house and the delightful days and evenings she had spent in it. She thought of her husband, his nobility of person and mind, and set over against his image that of St. Ange, as she had just seen him, sighing and sipping his coffee and speaking softly with a delicious self-conceit of "my own fatal beauty."

Suddenly she resolved to return to New York. She wanted to see her husband.

"And I will tell Robert," she thought, "that Clara wants to go back to Mayberry, and that I will not be left here with St. Ange. I will tell him that I want my home—yes, that I want to be with him. After all there is no company like Robert's. Even when he is thinking and silent what quick, loving glances he has given me!"

Clara approved her resolution.

"You must resign this house in two weeks," she said, "and two weeks may be of the greatest importance. So much can be lost or gained in two weeks. Go back to New York, and I will attend to all that is to be packed and put in order."

So Ambrosia kissed her friend and left Newport, being more willing to do so than she had been glad and happy to come to it.

She was delighted to see her own house, but its desolate appearance reproached her. It was September, and the housekeeper ought to have had it opened and at least partially in order. She rang the bell with some anger, and was soon confronted with her belated servant. She fancied she was insolently indifferent. She was made to feel that her unlooked-for return before the time specified was an intrusion. And though Robert was delighted at this intrusion, she thought he was not angry enough in her anger, that he deprecated any great displeasure and was a trifle annoyed at Ambrosia's complaints.

"Mrs. Ryan did not expect you for two weeks, my dear," he said. "You must make some allowance. Let us forget Mrs. Ryan and the neglected house. You must have some new songs or some news that I should like to hear. What are they doing now in Newport?"

"Chiefly admiring your favorite St. Ange."

"Is that really so? And how does he take the adulation?"

"He laments with a delightful conceit his unintentional fascination and his 'too fatal beauty.'"

"He told me he was quite an authority there."

"My dear Robert, until St. Ange has given his

ten-cent utterance about any entertainment, it is thought presumptuous for inferior tastes to offer an opinion. And he takes himself so seriously. It is all very amusing, if it were not so monotonous."

"At any rate, he is a perfectly safe man among ladies, and I suppose they feel it. I do not think St. Ange has a single vice. And I never heard any one express more lofty sentiments about women."

"A modest vice might be better than so much virtue. St. Ange is always beating the tom-toms of his own conceited excellence. Did you know he writes poetry? A scientist and surgeon writing poetry!"

"Why not? Have you seen any of it?"

"You may find him aiding the forlorn muse of the magazines in 'Laments' and 'Voices Out of the Darkness' and so on. He writes 'lyrics' also, and the girls sing them. I wish you could hear the singing, especially when he 'assists.' It is delicious."

"He never told me he was a writer."

"My dear Robert, every other person is a writer. It is the fashion to wear our hearts on our sleeves and ask a small fee for their inspection. I know lots of women who, when they are weary, write down their feelings and exchange them for a little base coin."

"Really?"

"Really. This is the age of confessions. No matter how sorry a figure the inner man and woman make, they must have their little exhibition."

"And you, Amber?"

"I make my little exhibitions to you, dearest."

And this was a confession so charming, given with so much *naïveté* and such eloquent glances, that

Robert Carter was delighted to receive it. He felt at that hour only the invincible captivations of his wife, and her very imperfections seemed a part of them.

It is not often that events come to our expectations; but Ambrosia was satisfied with the result of her unexpected move. The next few days she was busily engaged in the ordering of her house, and during this time she had a unique and very novel pleasure—she had her husband entirely to herself. They were quite alone for the first time since they had commenced housekeeping. It was like a second honeymoon. The trouble is that human nature can not long keep up to its highest points under any emotion, and that custom dulls the sweetest joy. Ambrosia noticed the slightest subsidence in her husband's feeling, before she herself was conscious of the least.

One morning, a week after her return, Robert, in leaving the house, said to the housekeeper :

"Mrs. Ryan, tell Meta not to come to the office to-day."

Ambrosia, who had just opened the door in order to go upstairs and make a street-toilet, heard the words distinctly. She thought there was something less formal in the tone than a mere order to a domestic warranted. And who was Meta? No servant of that name was in her employ. Yet Robert spoke as if "Meta" were a regular member of the household.

She was annoyed and troubled by the circumstance and she sat down again to think it over. Her first natural thought was to ring for Mrs. Ryan and ask her about "Meta." She put it aside immediately.

The question would show a servant that Doctor Carter did not altogether rely on his wife. She could not endure the humiliation of such a position. It would be best to ask her husband for the information, and she resolved to do so that very evening.

But she fell into the snare of her sex's weakness, and instead of a plain, direct question, she went on her search by devious ways. She asked if he had been informed of the changes during the summer; if there had been any trouble among the girls, etc., etc. She tried to get under and around the person called Meta without the slightest effort. The doctor answered her questions with precisely the air of an innocent and non-interested man.

The shadowy Meta troubled the peace of the evening. Ambrosia had a feeling of resentment. She had "led up" to a point so frequently, where the doctor must have remembered Meta, and yet he gave no information about her. The circumstance depressed her. She could not talk or sing or rise to any level from which it was possible to command her husband's sole attention. He finally took a book and began to read and make notes, and Ambrosia sank down among the satin cushions of the sofa and pretended to go to sleep.

In the morning there was the same politeness, the same inertia, the same broken sympathy. The doctor thought his wife was in one of her disagreeable moods. He advised her to take a certain medicine and kissed her with the air of a man who is at once tolerant and grieved. Ambrosia thought her husband was deceiving her. He knew something about a person called Meta, and he had not told her, though she had exhausted confidence, so far as her own

affairs were concerned. And as she truly loved him, she was wounded by his thoughtlessness—if it was not something worse than thoughtlessness.

As the doctor left the house, she walked to a window looking on to the side-street, and from which point it was possible, by an effort, to see the door of the office and laboratory. It was almost an instinct to watch him thus far; she had done so ever since they were married. Her eyes fell instantly on a young woman, and the conviction jumped to her heart that the young woman was Meta. The doctor was close behind her. Ambrosia watched them breathlessly. The doctor walked with his usual firm, rapid tread. The girl slightly loitered. Just before the office was reached they met. The doctor had the key in his hand, but the door was already open, and they went in together.

Then Ambrosia felt as if there was a fire in her heart. She could not breathe freely; a strong hand grasped her by the throat. The hysterical symptoms, so often encouraged, advanced now without invitation and without welcome. She stood still resolutely and arrested her soul and bade it be strong. Though but blindly and falteringly, she yet forced her feet to carry her to the medicine appointed for such a crisis, for she was resolved to conquer the weakness by which she was assailed. A long time she was on the verge of defeat, but finally she fell into a deep sleep.

It lasted some hours, and when it was over she found it had "brought healing on its wings." She was able to think. She was able to feel, not in one overwhelming wave of confused emotion, but in distinct lines. She looked at the circumstance in every

light and every likelihood, and excuse was overthrown by the fact that Robert had not told her. At length she determined to go to the laboratory. She glanced at a timepiece. The hours for patients were long over. The office would doubtless be cleaned and locked. If Meta was a patient, she would not be there. But if she had any other business with the doctor, she would be in the laboratory, which was situated above the office.

In the early days of their married life, Robert had given her a key of these rooms, and she had often gone there an hour before dark and persuaded him to ride or walk with her. But she found at last that the smell of the gases and chemicals made her sick; and the doctor had promised to reverse the order and come for her. He did so for a little time, and then the custom, for various reasons, fell into disuse, as all over-drafts upon affection must surely do.

She looked now for the forgotten key, and found it in the top drawer among the soiled gloves and odds and ends of lace and ribbons, broken fans and crumpled programmes that are usually the contents of that receptacle. Then she dressed herself with a tasteful attention. She had no plan beyond this invasion of her husband's sanctum and her own beautiful toilet. But she had a great faith in her personal influence and a great confidence in beauty adorned as its most effective ally.

It was a lovely evening, and she assured herself that Robert would think her idea of a stroll before dinner a good one. With a good deal of affected confidence, she turned the corner and went to the office-door. It was open. She needed not to have looked for the key. The reception-room and the doctor's

office had been put in order, and the woman who attended to this business had gone away. Then she went upstairs. There was a small room at the head of the stairs, and a boy looked out of it. Ambrosia did not know him. He was washing bottles and other glass vessels, and he wore a black apron.

Ambrosia asked him if Doctor Carter was in the laboratory, and with a touch of pride said she was Mrs. Carter. The boy answered: "The doctor is all right. He is in the big room;" and then he screwed his mouth to one side and looked at Ambrosia, as if he thought she was taking Mrs. Carter's name in vain. She did not see the look, and the next moment she had opened the door of the big room.

The scene in its most trifling details was instantly photographed on her vision and memory. Doctor Carter was standing with his back to the door, talking in a low, monotonous voice. Meta was sitting at a table, writing down in stenographic signs the matter of his talk; and Doctor St. Ange, with his sleeves rolled up to his elbows, was putting something strange into a chemical bath. Ambrosia looked steadily at Meta for a moment. The girl was beautiful, and she took the look with the uttermost unconcern. Then Ambrosia spoke to her husband in a charming tone, and the doctor turned slowly round and seemed for a moment dazed by the interruption. He had to make an effort to change the scientist into the husband; but he made it with a grand condescension, and then instantly dismissed his assistants, but St. Ange managed to drive home to Ambrosia's heart, with a single pitying look, a suspicion cruel as death.

Then the walk which was the ostensible cause of the visit was taken. It was not a thing to be repeated. Robert tried to be interested, Ambrosia tried to be amusing; but when a man has a medical-science paper on his mind, how can any woman charm him, charm she never so wisely? Ambrosia saw that all her bright sayings lost their wit in the unresponsive mental atmosphere. They were not seen through at all, or they were recognized so late as to have lost their point, or they were taken seriously and disputed.

Also the east wind rose and the dust came in unpleasant swirls. It blinded their eyes and soiled Ambrosia's delicate cloth costume. It looked a long way home. A cab seemed better than the walk back again. Ambrosia said so, and Robert gladly indorsed the opinion. "The wind is so unpleasant," he added, in excuse, and Ambrosia answered:

"It is. Every second girl you meet is holding her hat on. The walk has been a failure."

And she felt cross at the failure, though it was but a natural sequence. Who can bring back a pleasure when the time for it has been outlived? Does the violet expect a second spring, or the rose try to renew its June in September? Only men and women fancy they may recapture the glory of their first day of love by such mechanical aids as visiting the same scenes or doing the same things. The ride home was silent. Robert was trying to catch the thread of an argument Ambrosia's entrance had broken; and Ambrosia was thinking of the girl Meta watching her husband's face for the words she was to transcribe, and perhaps even more of that rapid, intelligent glance which St. Ange had sent

through her eyes into her heart, making it quake with an angry apprehension.

Dinner did little to relieve the tension. St. Ange was present, and each had an unshared thought to preoccupy his or her mind. All Ambrosia's remarks, however witty or wise, were like words out of season. St. Ange let them drop—perhaps purposely. The doctor made spasmodic efforts to appreciate at least their intent, and then there was again a pause. When St. Ange left, Ambrosia had become reckless. Right time or wrong time, she was determined to know all about the girl in the laboratory.

"Who is that girl I saw in your office this afternoon, Robert? You never named her to me."

"She is a granddaughter of Mrs. Ryan's."

He was writing something on a slip of paper. He looked up to answer the question and then began to write again. It is difficult to question a man lost in an alien subject, but Ambrosia was becoming every moment more and more resolved to have her suspicions attended to.

"Put down your writing and talk to me, Robert. I am curious about the girl. How did you come to know her?"

He answered with some vexation :

"Oh, in the most natural way in the world. I advertised for a stenographer. I told Mrs. Ryan that I had done so, and that there might be a number of persons to see me between five and six o'clock about the position. She said instantly she had a granddaughter staying with her who was an expert and out of employment, and would I please give her a trial. The girl was there ready to begin work. I tried her all day and found her singularly satisfac-

tory. Indeed, I might seek New York through and not come across another woman, or even man, so quick to catch my ideas and so able to transfer them. I consider Meta a great help, a find, a treasure in her duties."

"Why did you not tell me about her?"

"I never thought it would concern or interest you. I have changed my boy four times since Peterhoff first opened the office for you. I never thought of telling you I had done so."

"This girl is different."

"No. She is simply a part of my business arrangements. You do not interest yourself about them. The office has been refurnished. I never told you of that change. I have a variety of new instruments, retorts, etc. I have a new clerk in the lower office. I never told you of these changes. Meta is of the same kind."

"Robert, I wish you would get a man in Meta's place. I will tell you the truth: I am unhappy to have any woman so near to you—a pretty young woman, too."

"Now you are jealous, Amber; and it is a contemptible passion, because I give you no cause—not the slightest."

"I am jealous. I confess it, Robert. How would you like some handsome man sitting with me hours at a time, watching my eyes and my lips for every word I speak?"

"Has not the delightful St. Ange been with you constantly, playing to your playing, singing to your singing, dancing with you, reading with you?"

"I would have been better pleased if you had objected to such familiarity. I hate the man. I took

precious good care that he was never alone with me. If you are jealous—I repeat your own words—it is a contemptible passion, for I give you no cause, not the slightest.”

“I have not accused you. I do not object to St. Ange being with you. I have perfect confidence in you. Give me the same honorable privileges I give you.”

“I wish you did accuse me. I wish you loved me well enough to be afraid of my love, to be careful and grudging a little of my society. If you will insist on having this girl, in spite of my entreaties to dismiss her, then you must keep her with the knowledge that you make me miserable in doing so.”

“Amber, there is a line of limitations even between a man and his wife—points a husband is not called upon to yield—points a wife may lawfully hold sacredly personal. I make that line at my office door. Whatever touches my profession is sacredly personal to me. I will be the sole judge of its propriety. I will not allow even you to alter or to advise or to interfere in any way.”

“I shall dismiss Mrs. Ryan to-morrow.”

“You will do precisely as you wish in all household arrangements. The house is your kingdom. In it you may be as autocratic as you desire. You may remember, however, that Mrs. Ryan is hired by the year and that you must pay her wages to the 1st of next March, whether you keep her or not.”

“To-morrow she leaves my house.”

“To-morrow you will think better of the case. You will tell yourself Mrs. Ryan would like nothing better than to be dismissed with her full wages, and

you will make her stay and earn her money. Why should you keep her in idleness for six months?"

"Robert! Dear Robert! Send Meta away—just to please me! Say it is a whim of mine—an unreasonable whim, if you like—but do send her away!"

"When she has done the work for which I hired her."

"To-morrow, Robert! To-morrow! I shall be ill! I shall go insane!"

"Oh, no! You have too much good sense."

"I wish Will were here!"

"I wish he were, with all my heart. Now, Amber, I have a most important subject on my mind, and I positively refuse to be further disturbed. I can tell you that I would not have left it for any human being but yourself, this afternoon. No, I would not. If the President of the United States had asked me to walk with him, I would have excused myself. No one but a woman and wife would have put herself and her pleasure before such universal interests as now occupy my mind."

"You should have told me about the 'universal interests.' And, perhaps, a little confidence and explanation might have made Meta more endurable."

"'Confidence and explanation' is a new fad with you, as regards my office. You never asked it before."

"In your office arrangements there was never a pretty young woman before, that I knew of. But I shall never call for you any more."

"I hope you will not, Amber. Outside my office and my work, I am your devoted lover and friend. That ought to content any reasonable wife."

"And Meta is to be your companion in your work."

No reasonable wife would submit to such conditions."

"The girl Meta is but an implement. You may as well be jealous of my lancets and microscopes, my pens, ink and paper. I will discuss the subject no longer. It is a very silly subject, as I understand it."

Then he lifted some books and went with them to the library, and Amber sat still in the lonely splendor of the drawing-room. She was not very jealous, but she burned with the idea that her servants were aware of the position, and that the vulgarity of their natures would lead them to conclude she was deserted by her husband for a girl of their own class. Meta had doubtless told her grandmother of Mrs. Carter's visit to the office, and Amber was sure the girl divined, not only her suspicions, but also the doctor's reluctance to leave his work. She imagined all that St. Ange would imply by his lifted eyebrows and his deprecating smiles. She felt certain, at that very moment, the kitchen forces were aware that the doctor had gone to the library, because he had quarreled with her about the girl Meta. She had been wounded by the hand that should have upheld her, wounded for the laughter and triumph of her servants, men and women. This was the bitterness of the trial.

Yet it is but fair to say that Robert never thought of his refusal in this light. Men are incapable of feeling these small stings and flings of wrong, and they cannot comprehend the cruel, piercing hurt they inflict on women. If Ambrosia had explained this feeling he would have smiled and said: "My dear wife, what can it possibly matter to you how

your servants talk or what they think of you? Send them away if they annoy you." The housekeeper's calm look of triumph; the housemaid's insolent flip with the feather-brush; the little scornful laugh with which two talking servants separated on her approach. A score of such contemptible signs of vulgar triumph were evident to Ambrosia; but they were of that cruel class of wrongs which can never be spoken of. The giver of them is panoplied by their very doubtfulness and insignificance. They could be denied, and then how foolish would the complainer appear? They could be imputed to another source or motive, and then who would like to be put in the position of appropriating insults not intended for them?

In these sorrowful days the thought of Will Carter continually haunted Ambrosia. If only Will had been at her side! Will was not too great and wise to understand the trifles that make up a woman's joy or misery. She could have talked to Will about the servants and about St. Ange's indefinable airs of sympathy. For since he had given her that look of intelligence in the office, he had assumed an understanding which he expressed by sighs, by excessive thoughtfulness for her personal comforts and by a sad, condoling look in his wide-open compassionate dark eyes. When alone with her, he affected the manner of a man in the presence of a crushing sorrow; and if she resented this attitude by a show of happiness, then he smiled with that sorrowful appreciation, which is given to a brave heart dissembling its wrongs and suffering.

"If Will would only come! Will would notice this covert impertinence. Will would understand

her grave annoyance at such behavior. Will would find some way of making Robert respect her feelings both about St. Ange and the girl Meta. Robert was different. He had that large, intense character which can only occupy itself with facts. Ambrosia had always found her complaints of St. Ange's officiousness treated with indifference. Robert had smiled at her supersensitiveness or said what a prejudiced little woman she was or assured her he was not one of those husbands who wanted her to prove her love for him by treating all other men badly ; or he might be a bit scornful and remind her how great a favorite St. Ange was with many lovely young ladies, and, therefore, hardly likely to be thinking of her at all. She had never been able to rouse the least suspicion or annoyance at St. Ange's ways ; and really his offenses were things not easily explainable. If put into words, they sounded trivial enough to provoke a smile. And Robert was so accustomed to arguing only from strict certainties that smiles, looks and even words, which might be taken in a great many senses, appeared to him hardly worthy of notice.

If Will would only come ! She remembered now often, sadly enough, how little she had valued Will's devotion ; how often she had made him feel that his effusive affection was a little of a bore. She recalled now, with an irrepressible gasp of shame, how often Will had gone away from her presence to his comforting organ with his cheeks flushed with wounded love and his eyes full of tears, called there by her scornful acceptance of some brotherly offering or some pitiless criticism of his personal appearance. But if he would only come again, she would never

more wound his kind heart. She could tell Will all. She knew Will would fight her battles, small or great. How often he had stayed from the "meetings" in which he delighted, only to please her! How often he had silenced his organ because she was nervous! How often, how very often, he had forgotten his own desires in gratifying hers! His absence had taught her his value. When he came back, she would love and trust him, as he deserved to be loved and trusted.

Alas! This good resolution was among the many good ones that come too late. Will had found a new love—an absorbing love—a love to which his sisterly love for Ambrosia was as the dawn is to the noonday. Will had met Louisa Madison, and Louisa had appreciated, at their full value, qualities which Ambrosia had held so cheaply.



CHAPTER XV.

WILL'S MARRIAGE.

Hanging and wiving goes by destiny.

—*Shakespeare.*

An thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou 'lt take cold
shortly.

Every time

Serves for the matter that is then born in 't.

—*Shakespeare.*

It was Bessie's doing, of course. Ambrosia had divined truly enough the trend of Bessie's intentions, for they were very natural ones. Her own love affairs being so definitely and delightfully fixed, why should she not attend a little to the love affairs of others? And as the circle of her acquaintances in England was limited, she thought at once of Louisa and then of Will Carter, and she resolved to be an angel to them.

It gave her some trouble. She had to find out the whereabouts of James and his bride and sister, and when this was done, to look after Will. It was her plan to bring all to Ambleside about the middle of August. The beauty of the English lakes in that month was excuse enough ; and as she was a posi-

tive and persistent correspondent, she managed to get her way, with such a slight variation as turned out to be propitious to her intentions. The Texas party was on time. Will Carter was behind it. But Louisa gladly accepted Bessie's invitation to remain with her, and let James and Azalia pursue travel alone.

"And I call your invitation a godsend," said Louisa, "for if there is a purgatory on earth it is the constant society of the freshly married. Azalia thinks the world was made for James and herself, and she is astounded if every one else does not also think so. The way they 'my loved' and 'my darlinged' one another gave me a nausea. I hope I shall have a little common decency if I ever do take a wedding trip."

"I noticed their 'enwrapped' condition," said Bessie, scornfully. "The creatures are abnormal. No ordinary fools are quite as much fools as James and Azalia are."

"They are going to Switzerland first."

"Let us hope the hotel bills and the glaciers may turn their conversation from 'I' and 'we' a little."

"They never bought me any dresses or fal-fals. I expected James to be selfish. But Azalia was selfish also. However, women have as much right to be selfish as men have."

"Certainly ; but a woman honors her right most by waiving it. That is what I think. I had a letter from Will Carter this afternoon. I am glad he did not come while the bride and bridegroom occupied all Windermere and the boats and the beauties thereof. Will is not selfish. He is real good every way."

"I hope he is not handsome. I am worn out with handsome men."

"Will is not considered handsome."

"Is he tall?"

"No. Will is of medium height, but he walks lightly. He is animated and frankly American. His face does not take shadows, and there is such a light in his eyes that you never notice how he looks nor yet how he is dressed."

"But I dare say he will notice how we are dressed."

"Indeed he will! He has been used to living with well-dressed women. I do not mean with women 'upholstered' by their modistes in satin or tweed, in blue or green, but women artistically and suitably robed."

"What time will he arrive?"

"About nine this evening. So you can make a fine evening toilet for a first appearance."

"And I need not disappoint uncle. I promised to go on the lake with him this afternoon."

"Even if you do that, I would prepare for the unexpected. Wear that pretty boating-dress you had made in London for Henley. Will might happen earlier. All men have uncertainties."

The provision turned out to be a wise one. When Louisa returned to the little pier, after two hours' char-fishing, she saw Bessie waiting there for her. By Bessie's side stood a slight young man, who, even at a distance, impressed an observer with the idea of gentlemanly good-nature. He was holding Bessie's parasol and talking merrily to her. As the boat came close to land, the sound of their voices and their low laughter rippled and mingled with the ripple and splash of the water from the dripping

oars; and as soon as Will saw there was a lady in the boat, his first natural instinct was to assist her.

With a pleasant "Excuse me," to Bessie, he was at the boat-edge and holding out his hand to Louisa, even while he was greeting Mr. Madison. Louisa laid her hand in Will's hand; their eyes met; then Will's fell to the slight gangway on which Louisa's feet were cautiously stepping. They were lovely feet, exquisitely dressed in silk stockings of gendarme blue, met by dark-blue shoes with straps across the instep.

As soon as these pretty, hesitating feet had set themselves safely upon dry land, Bessie went to her cousin's side and introduced Will Carter to her. That ceremony was all that was necessary. In another moment, Will was holding Louisa's parasol and talking to the lovely water-nymph; for Louisa had the special charm of putting men thoroughly at ease by simply allowing them to do all and say all there was to do and say. She gave herself up to Will as it were—allowed him to wipe a few drops of water from her blouse with his silk kerchief, took the side of the road he suggested, let him carry on the conversation, accepting all his opinions and encouraging him to give them with the sweetest of smiles and the most kindly glances from her dark eyes.

Will thought the walk from the pier to the hotel an absurdly short one. This delightful girl in a gendarme-blue Henley suit, with its corn-colored blouse, charmed him. Never before had he felt so much at his ease with a stranger. Perhaps for the first time in all his life he had a sense of having done himself complete justice. The calmness of Louisa had permitted him to be calm, to keep his

speech, his hands, his feet, all well in control. He had said nothing foolish; he had done nothing he wished undone.

"She is the most delightful girl I ever met in my life," he said, with a happy confidence, to Bessie.

"She has fine eyes," answered Bessie.

"She has divine eyes! So soft and tender! It is a joy to look at them!"

"And that hat of blue drawn lisse, with its flowers of shaded blue, is vastly becoming above them. Louisa looks well in that shade of blue."

But when evening came, and Louisa appeared at dinner in a gown of thin brown canvas, worn over an amber-silk petticoat, with sleeves of amber silk and plastrons to match, and amber combs in her black hair, Will suffered a fresh enchantment. He sat at the side of this goddess, and she charmed him anew every moment. If he ate anything, he was not aware of the act. His eyes and ears usurped his consciousness. And yet Louisa spoke very little, only enough to set Will talking. Her *rôle* was to listen and look interested. She had only to smile and look in Will's face and lift her large, expressive eyes to his small gray ones, and Will was both praised for what he had said and encouraged to go on. At the end of the evening, Louisa had said hardly anything; nods and wreathed smiles and pretty interjections represented her conversation; but Will told Bessie he had "never met a more sensible or entertaining woman."

And yet Will had been intimate with the brilliant Ambrosia and with the learned Miss Radway. He had known many ladies who wrote novels and others who wrote social essays. He had visited the poetess

of the era and sat at the feet, figuratively, of all who in any way interpreted the genius and aspirations of the dying nineteenth century. And with all these guides and gauges of intellect to school his judgment, Will Carter said, in very earnest, of Louisa Madison: "She is the most sensible and entertaining woman I ever met."

For it is a fact that if girls would only learn to "efface themselves," they would find it an easy way to be sensible and entertaining, and there would be fewer flirtations and a great many more marriages. Louisa only did naturally what any self-restraining girl can do artificially. She really liked to dress herself beautifully, and receive, without either mental or physical effort, the entertainment provided for her. He was equally tired of the mental gymnastics of intellectual women and the tiresome graces of physical-culture women. She was an inexpressible rest to Will. He was glad to hear Louisa say that, if she had to play lawn-tennis long, it would give her a tennis "brain" as well as the "elbow" and "knee" trouble it is accountable for. She looked charming in his eyes when she thought "a tennis-woman a queer study of the nineteenth-century humanity;" when she could not admire "women who do their athletics in public;" when she was not sure that she admired athletic young women at all; when she disliked even the leather belts girls now affected, "because a ribbon belt looks so much more feminine." It pleased him to hear her say she really could not bear to buckle her waist in evil-smelling leather. "Odious!" How then could he avoid looking again at the pretty slim waist, girdled with a blue cestus, that Venus herself might have worn?

It must not be supposed that all these views came at one time from Louisa. They were a code of opinions, formed slowly in her own mind and not wastefully enunciated. They lasted her a long time, and Will was amazed at the consistency of Louisa's mind.

"She had some fixed ideas," he proudly told himself, and these ideas, fortunately, all fitted into his own. And then he compared her modest way of suggesting her opinions and listening to his opinions with the confident, airy satisfaction of the average clever girl of New York.

"Louisa has no self-consciousness," he thought, "and most of the brilliant women I have met seem to talk before their looking-glass. Bessie often gives me that impression—so does Ambrosia—so does every one but Louisa."

In the presence of this unique and satisfactory companion, a month went away like a happy dream. The life led was regular and blissful. Mr. Madison went fishing every possible day and came home in the evening to his dinner, full of enthusiasm about the people and the country. Bessie had John's apparently endless letters to answer. She was a little vain of the quires and quires of adoration she received. Already she regarded herself as a married woman and put on those airs of severe reservation common to neophytes in the holy state of matrimony. She treated Louisa and Will very much in a maternal spirit. Her attitude was a satisfactory "go and be happy, my children." And Will and Louisa took the tacit permission with joy and gratitude. They wandered among the laurel walks and sailed upon the lakes and set their dream of love in

natural and romantic beauties that had no comparison elsewhere.

One lovely night in early September, they were in Grasmere, at the Prince of Wales Hotel. After dinner was over, Mr. Madison being very weary with a day's trout-fishing, fell asleep; and Bessie sat down to read and answer the letters delayed and on time, which the mail had just brought her. Then Will said to Louisa:

"Come, let us go to the famous Wishing Gate."

She rose with a smile. The moon was at the full; the air was just chill enough to give an excuse for the white fleecy wraps, in which she looked lovelier than ever; and Bessie smiled on their departure, with the manner of one, who amid her own important interests, had still a watchful care over theirs. Down the old Roman road they went slowly, hand in hand, to the Wishing Gate. Bessie had talked to Louisa about the magic spot, and told her she must be sure of her desires, because whatever she longed for on that spot would certainly come to pass. Then Bessie, who had a nice little imagination of her own, though well in control, began to speculate about the thousands and hundreds of thousands who had stood upon the fair ground and asked for their heart's desire. And she lifted the hotel "*Wordsworth*" and made Louisa read how—

"Even the stranger from afar,
Reclining on the moss-grown bar,
Unknowing and unknown;
The infection of the ground partakes,
Longing for his beloved; who makes
All happiness her own."

So Louisa was well prepared for the mystical glamour

of the scene. And, oh, how fair it was ! The moonlight invested everything with an ineffable beauty. Will was silent. Louisa had no desire to speak. They leaned upon the bar and whispered to the genius of the spot their wishes, and felt all the charm which indulgent centuries had woven thrill their hearts.

And so it happened that the genius was propitious ; for, as they lingered by the bar, Will put his wish to the test, and got it. Then it transpired that Louisa had wished as Will had wished ; and that in granting Will's wish she also granted her own.

Then Will had another wish. Why should not the promise be made perfect upon ground so auspicious ? That very day they had visited Grasmere Church and sat among its "crowded pillars" and under its ancient roof, upheld—

"By naked rafters intricately crossed."

They had read together the admonitory texts inscribed upon its walls, and marveled a little at the "winged heads of rudely painted cherubim." And Will, whose soul was sweetest when it soared loftiest, had been strangely touched and pleased to see Louisa, as she entered the church, silently fall upon her knees to keep the charge inscribed above the portal :

"Whoever thou art that enterest this church, leave it not
Without one prayer to God for thyself ; for those
Who minister and for those who worship here."

And in the making of this one prayer Will and Louisa came very closely and tenderly together, kneeling side by side at the oaken bench in the nave.

So will had taken a strange fancy for the old



church of St. Oswald. He felt that marriage would be a very sweet and sacred thing in it, and just as soon as he obtained Louisa's promise to be his wife, he asked :

“ Why not, then, in Grasmere Church ? ”

Louisa was not able to find any reasons worth considering against Will's urgent arguments for his own way. He had always disliked show weddings. He thought marriage ought to be a sacred personal matter. Nothing would delight him so much as a quiet eight-o'clock-in-the-morning ceremony, with the rector and clerk, Mr. Madison and Bessie as its witnesses. They could have a family breakfast at nine, and take the ten o'clock train for London. And at London they could decide upon their future movements.

All this perfect plan had come in one drift of thought to Will, after the Wishing Gate had given him his wish. It is the usual way—one favor, and then another to bind it. Louisa had, however, few objections. If affairs took a conservative course, she must either be married from Bessie's house in New York or from her father's house in Texas. Bessie would be the ruling spirit in New York. Alphonse and Margaret were in possession in Texas. In either case there would be a certain amount of dictation and deference. An informal marriage would at once make her her own mistress. No one could dictate to her about wedding presents and dresses and meddlesome, disagreeable bridesmaids. These thoughts and kindred ones passed rapidly through her mind as Will urged his plan, and when he ceased his persuasive arguments she was ready to answer :

"Dear Will, whatever pleases you most pleases me most."

Bessie, upon being taken into council, screwed up her pretty face and looked at first very dissenting. But as Will reiterated his arguments, she was busy with some of her own, which fitted very well into Will's. It would rather detract from the *éclat* of her own wedding to have Louisa's in New York. Whether Louisa's was before or after hers, there would be comparisons. Then it would be a little "stunner" to Ambrosia to find that her inseparable Will, her obedient Will, had got married without even a word of advice or permission from her. No one could deny that Ambrosia had acted as if she owned both her husband and her husband's brother. No one could deny that Ambrosia was awfully patronizing. Will's sudden marriage would be a little lesson for her. Women have no special ill-will in such thoughts. They simply like to get ahead of one another. Men do the same.

So the wedding took place, and was as fortunate in all respects as the wooing had been. It was such a day as September sometimes gives, serene and bright. The sunshine flooded the ancient altar and the rector's white vestments and the kneeling bride and the bridegroom. The organ welcomed them with a joyful melody, and sent them forth with a triumphant measure. An atmosphere of chastened gladness pervaded every event, and the going-away was only noticeable for its composure and for the general disposition to say: "What a suitable ceremony! What a lovely bride! How sure they are to be happy!"

At the very last moment, as Bessie was kissing the bride good-bye, Will said :

"Bessie, dear, do me one more favor : Write to Ambrosia and tell her. I will write as soon as we reach Paris."

Bessie nodded an acceptance of the commission, and then the train moved, and the affairs of Will and Louisa were entirely in their own hands.

Bessie sighed and turned away. Why do people always sigh after the newly married have left them ?

Is it because they are glad that a certain strain has been removed, or is it because, in an almost unconscious manner, the breaking-up of any set of circumstances prefigures the great dissolution ? The soul is often sensitive and sympathetic without the knowledge or aid of its "house of clay." So sighing and yet not sad, thoughtful and yet pleasantly thoughtful, Bessie sat down to fulfill Will's commission :

"DEAR AMBER : I have been awfully neglectful of my duty to you lately. But what can a girl do with two love affairs on her heart and hands ? I do not mean two of my own—for it would be impossible to find a man worthy to rival Jack—you must count me for one and put the second down to my cousin Louisa, who is a most charming, womanly creature and who has been staying with me for some weeks. James and Azalia have been here also, and they were so admirable that we felt a little of their society would do for a long time. Certainly, James thinks the world owes him gratitude for condescending to be born thirty years ago and then condescending to get married, like other common mortals. And yet, when I think of all the evil James might have done and has not done, I am amazed at his restraint. For instance, he might have been a horse-thief or a card-sharper, or he might have followed Ingersoll and written against Christianity, or entered into any of the many evils which exist in so large a city ;

but he has committed none of these villainies ; *au contraire*, he has married a nice girl with lots of money and in other points done so well unto himself that the world has every cause to praise him. Azalia is the shadow of his virtues and the echo of his wisdom. So you may understand how glad Louisa, who is only an ordinary mortal, was to desert their excellencies and stay with me, who also am only an ordinary mortal. We found it easy to live together without getting on each other's nerves. And pretty soon came Mr. Will Carter, whom I need not describe to you, and he fell—no, he tumbled—over head in love with Louisa ; and no wonder, for, as I have said, Louisa has every womanly grace ; and this morning they were married in Grasmere Church ; and that is the end, or rather, the beginning, of the matter. It was an idyllic wedding in every respect ; so charmingly simple, graceful and religious. I should be on tiptoes of delight if I could marry Jack in just such a fashion ; but, oh, dear, in New York one must be New Yorkish, and I suppose I shall be obliged to submit to a fine public ceremony. Jack has that idea. The fact is, Jack is so proud of me he wants all the world to see his good fortune. Will and Louisa are now on their way to London. Where they will go and what they will do afterward are uncertain, except that they will not go anywhere preoccupied by James and Azalia. Will asked me to write to you, and he says he will write himself as soon as possible ; but do not be angry if he forgets, for his mind travels in a circuit of which 'sweet Louisa' is the center. We expect to be at home before Christmas. Jack thinks the house will be in fine order by that time, and Jack has supreme taste in such matters. We are going to Paris next month. I begin to feel a little interest in my wedding things, though I do not intend to indulge the vulgar idea of a *trousseau*. It is so like getting all you can out of a father, as if you expected never to get anything from your husband as long as you live. You know I have some original ideas, and this is one of them. Do you remember those immensely rich, vulgar Smith-Martels, whose house in New York is all gilt, marble and looking-glass ? They came here yesterday—they, and their man-servants and their maid-servants, their horses and their carriages and their baby. I met it in its nurse's arms an hour ago. I like babies generally, but this baby has such a smug, vulgar, ready-money expression that it roused my antipathy. It is not right, of course, not to like a baby ; but a baby should

not look over-fed for its size. I have no other gossip you would understand about. Do send me a news-letter from New York. Is Doctor Carter as busy as ever? Will says you only get 'intermitting peeps at him,' he is so devoted to science. I am glad Jack is only a business man, for I am sure I would not be put off with 'intermittent peeps.'

Your affectionate cousin,

"BESSIE MADISON.

"P. S. Do not give me the credit of making the marriage between Will Carter and Louisa. Marriages like theirs are made in heaven, and I should not think of interfering with the business of the angels. Still, I am glad they remembered Will and Louisa. I never saw a couple so suited to each other, except Jack and myself and, of course, Doctor Carter and Mrs. Carter.

"Again, adieu!

B. M."

Ambrosia received this letter one day when she was in a very depressed mood, and it did not improve her condition. Her first overwhelming feeling was that every one was deserting her, and with a real heartache she cried out bitterly: "You, too, Will!" That Will had married was bad enough; that Bessie had found him a wife doubled the trouble. As for the "angel business," Ambrosia smiled scornfully at it. She lifted the letter again and read it more carefully. Then she laid it down on her knee and commented thus upon it:

"All this stuff about James Madison and his wife is put in to put off the real gist of the letter. That is so like Bessie! Why did she take so much bother to fence off the subject for another moment or two? It had to come. And she is so good as to say she need not describe Will Carter to me. I knew Will before she ever heard of him! Yet she puts on the airs of one who feels Will to be her very own particular discovery. And then, after all this palaver, she brings out the plain truth in the baldest man-

ner. Bessie felt she had done a mean thing, and that is all about it. She ought to have told me she intended bringing Will and Louisa together. As for not interfering with 'the angels' business,' she must have written lots of letters and taken no end of trouble, and what was that but 'interfering?' How absurd she is about Jack! Bessie is a little traitor. She is trying to wound me with every word. Ah, well, it is always a true saying: 'Since I wronged you I never liked you.'"

So musing, she sat a long time with the letter in her hand. Then she wrote an answer, and tore it up. After an hour's consideration she wrote another letter, sealed and stamped it, yet finally tore it also into small shreds and burnt them to ashes. Then she went to dress herself, and took a drive, and when she returned she sat down with a cynical smile and wrote:

"DEAREST BESSIE: I am delighted with your delightful letter and the news it brings. Dear, good Will! He was worthy of the 'sweet Louisa,' and I do hope they will be happy. If you are writing to Will, tell him how glad I am for him and that he must not trouble himself to write to me often. I know what honeymoon travel is; there is no time for any one but the beloved. I hope they may have such a joyful wander as Doctor Carter and I had. Ours was never surpassed and never will be, I am sure; never on this planet. I think your house is getting on; people are talking of its splendor. I would give Jack a reminder that you do not want to rival the Smith-Martels. Men in love have often such exuberant tastes. I wish I had time to write you a news-letter, but I am expecting my husband every moment, and, as Will says, we only get 'intermitting peeps' at each other. So I think we ought to make the most of every blessed moment. If you only try, a great deal of happiness can be got out of 'intermitting peeps.' And perhaps, after all, an intermittent condition is better than a wearisome monotony. Besides, the doctor's skill

and fame and the universal respect in which he is held add a kind of rarity to the quality and strength of his affection, so that its 'intermittent character' is something far better than a continuity or monotonous mediocrity. I am very proud of being such a great man's wife, and I hope I know how to take the drawbacks of greatness as well as its advantages. We can discuss this point when you are *one of the initiated*, and know all about it. I think you are right about your *trousseau*. I acted precisely as you are doing. So we both had the same original idea. I am glad you are going to have a fine wedding. Of course it was out of the question in my case—father being so ill at the time—but I hope to see you in all the traditional glory of a bride. Do try to get home before Christmas. Yours affectionately,

"AMBROSIA CARTER."

She called a servant and sent this letter at once. In an hour afterward, Doctor Carter entered the room. He looked inquiringly at his wife, and she looked at the fire. Neither spoke. So the doctor sat silently down and began to think out his evening's work. Ambrosia glanced up and saw the tension on his brow and the brooding look in his eyes, and knew that in his mind he had separated her from his thoughts. She had sent him away in the morning with an angry word, and she had fully determined to say the soft word which turneth away wrath, when he came home in the evening. But his air had been so decidedly that of a man expecting annoyance and indifferent to it, that she had felt suddenly chilled. It took her a little while to recover her intention. It was always a difficult thing for Ambrosia to say the first word. She waited anxiously for Robert to speak. She was ready to respond, to conciliate, but not ready to begin the conversation.

But Robert did not speak. He was carrying on an

argument with himself, and finally Ambrosia rose and, standing opposite his drooping face, said :

"Robert, do you know that Will is married?"

Robert started, and then, looking sadly into the fire, answered :

"Poor fellow! I am sorry for him."

"But Will is very happy."

"He may be—for a few weeks. He will pay for his pleasure with heartaches enough."

"Dear Robert, do not say such dreadful things. I do not wish to give you a single heartache."

"Then why do you give me so many?"

"Why do you give me so many?"

"Pshaw! The same old catechism! Is dinner ready? I am in a hurry to-night."

"Will has married Miss Madison, of Texas."

"It makes little matter who the woman is. As far as I can see, all women are alike—hard to live with."

"Am I hard to live with? Robert, darling! Forgive me! Kiss me, dearest! I love you! I love you! I love you so much!"

"Oh, Amber, how can you say—"

"I do! I do! I love you better than my life! Kiss me, Robert! Forgive me! Will you forgive me and love me, dear? Indeed, I am miserable unless you love me! Forgive me, darling!"

And the great doctor, scholar and scientist was but wax before the fire of his wife's love. He took her to his heart; he waved impatiently away all explanations and confessions. He canceled every wrong in a kiss. In a few moments she was sitting by his side reading Bessie's letter to him and making running comments on it as she read. She looked at her

husband and laughed, and he looked at her and laughed, and they went into the dining-room together, as happy as a couple of happy children.

"Are you sorry for Will now, Robert?" she whispered, after dinner; and the whisper went home with a kiss.

"I think Will has done the most sensible thing he ever did in his life, my dear," answered the doctor, emphatically. "I have no doubt he has got a good wife."

"All women are alike, Robert, dear"—this with another kiss.

"All alike good, my love. I am sure Miss Louisa Madison is good, or Will would not love her."

"And I know how tremendously Bessie admires herself; it is, therefore, wonderful to find her complimenting Louisa."

"She does not say very much about Louisa, though there is a great deal about others in her letter."

"Of course, Bessie has a perfect genius for spreading small bits of butter over any quantity of bread. She never praises anybody altogether. Bessie is my own cousin, but she is no saint."

"Jack Madison seemed to think her a saint or an angel or some other kind of sublimated woman."

"Robert, do you like saints?"

"Is it not better to be a saint than a sinner?"

Amber sighed, and looked bewitching as she did so. A tender, comical smile was on her lips. She lifted her husband's face between her hands and said:

"Sometimes sinners are more angel-like than saints. Can you deny it, sir?"

No! He endorsed it over and over and swore

to it with all his heart ; and when Amber asked him if she was really hard to live with, he said warmly she was delightful to live with. She was the joy and pleasure and sunshine of his life. He was sure he would not care to live without her. If Amber had then suggested that probably it was himself who was "difficult," Robert would have admitted at once that he was often a bear and exceedingly hard to please.

But Amber had some forbearance and discretion. She only kissed him again and said :

"Dear Robert, can you talk to me this evening?"

And Robert put away his books, assuring his wife that he had plenty of time and would really like nothing better.



CHAPTER XVI.

"LET ME ALONE TO-NIGHT!"

In love there are all these ills: wrongs, suspicions, quarrels, reconcilements, war, and peace again. If thou wouldst try to do things thus uncertain by a certain method, thou wouldst act as wisely as if thou wert to run mad with reason as thy guide.—*Terence.*

This little domestic scene, ending so much more happily than it might have done, was by no means the first or the last of its kind. Ambrosia had one characteristic which continually provoked them—the extraordinary quality of her "fine feelings." They were indeed so fine that Robert found it impossible to avoid injuring them, however careful he was. She could not settle down into his pace, and she grew substantially cross, because other absorbing affairs made him superficially so. Her "fine feelings" were distrustful feelings, uneasily jealous of their rights and insatiably craving a constant reassurance of absolute devotion. He had to live with them in a fool's paradise of perfectness, or be made to feel himself a brute. And though these pathetic scenes of tender accusation or sorrowful acceptance of supposed coldness did at first please Robert's love and vanity, they could not fail to pall in the

end, and Ambrosia was in real danger of bringing about the very alienation she had begun to deprecate before it existed.

The straightforward, regretful, affectionate way in which she had met her husband's cold absorption on the evening made memorable by the news of Will's marriage was an unusual demonstration. It was a peculiar mood, induced by peculiar circumstances. Bessie's letter had made suddenly manifest to her the necessity of some effort on her part to protect her supremacy. Bessie had found in Louisa a more congenial friend. Will had forgotten his sister in his wife. Clara had not been very often to see her lately. St. Ange's pitiful admiration, though unvoiced, annoyed her. She was well aware that her servants did not like her. Mrs. Ryan had felt herself deeply insulted by Ambrosia's utter oblivion of her granddaughter's presence in the laboratory, and Mrs. Ryan knew how to make every inferior servant echo her own feelings.

That day, Bessie's letter had given her a heart-shock. Will had gone; she must make more sure of her hold upon her husband. She had hoped so much from Will's return, and he would never come back to her. She might even go too far with a devotion so great as Robert's. There was a certain kind of fear as well as love influencing her submission. But, such as it was, it took Robert by surprise and won him. He had expected to find his wife going about with red eyes and an expression of exasperating injury, or else showing off a "sweet Griseldaism" and kissing the rod with an aggravating meekness. These conditions could be met either by isolating himself from them or by bringing Gri-

selda to reason through a good cry ; for Robert had learned that it *is the worst temper* which eventually carries the day, and that after a storm there was a likelihood of smooth sailing—until the next time.

Therefore Ambrosia's candid, affectionate advances were an unexpected attack, and Robert was easily conquered by them. They had a happy evening, and Ambrosia was delighted to see St. Ange's wide stare of astonishment at their satisfaction with each other. It seemed at last as if she had discovered the best way to influence her husband. But even such a charming submission can be carried too far. If Robert did not actually tire of them, he did tire of the previous unpleasantnesses which made them necessary, and the winter of love's discontent already chilled their hearts.

The season was advancing, but not yet very gay, and what Ambrosia needed was some living interest to give piquancy and motive to her life. She was having some exquisite toilets made, but interviews with *modistes* are not exhilarating, and they left her irritable and tired for the rest of the day ; and when she contemplated her social life for the coming winter, the prospects were not what she desired. It was evident that in the main she would be dependent on some other escort than her husband. And who was there? Will was now permanently engaged elsewhere. St. Ange was detestable. Of course, she could associate herself with Bessie, but that would inevitably set Bessie above her, and she meant to be Mrs. Doctor Carter and not Mrs. Jack Madison's cousin.

One Sunday morning, she said at breakfast :

"I am going to see Clara to-morrow, Robert. I

had a letter from her yesterday, and she says her father has had a relapse and is very weak. I telegraphed her to meet me."

"It is a very proper thing for you to do. I think the change also will do you good."

"I may stay for a day or two with Clara."

"All right."

"I suppose you will not miss me. I might stay a year and it would be 'all right.'"

"It would be a year's rest from such accusations, Amber. What time are you going? I will try to be at the train to see you."

"I can catch the noon train. Do not leave your work for my pleasure. It would only annoy you."

"Very well."

The next morning nothing was said about the visit to Clara. Robert stopped and kissed her ere he left the house, and Amber was too proud to remind him of her journey. But as soon as he closed the door she began to lament his indifference. So she had resolved to go to Clara with her troubles.

At the depot she looked anxiously for her husband. St. Ange came in his place. The doctor had been suddenly called from town, he said, and had sent him with his regrets and a great handful of roses.

Ambrosia did not want flowers. She put them carelessly down and was angry at heart. Tears she could not restrain filled her eyes. She had not spirit enough to resent the doubtful words and com- passionate looks of St. Ange. "What was the good?" she asked herself. She could have forgiven Robert's neglect of her, if only he was not so indifferent to

the attentions of St. Ange. If Robert did not love her, she wanted, at least, that he should have a dog-in-the-manger feeling about any other man loving her. So she was silent and constrained, and St. Ange took it for pride, and as the train moved away he glanced evilly after it and muttered behind his closed teeth:

"All things come to the man who can wait. My proud lady shall be humble enough some day!"

Ambrosia gave him no thought at all. Her husband's indifference pained her; and the desolate country through which she was whirled seemed a fitting frame for her hopeless thoughts. Bare branches tossed in the freezing wind; little pools of water; withered tufts of long grass; bare, unpainted, shut-up cottages; empty fields! What a dreary panorama of the worn-out, dying year it all was! She thought it a relief when the cars stopped; she had begun to feel as if she also was an atom, whirled by some irresistible fate. She looked round for Clara. Clara was not there. But an uncouth lad touched her familiarly, and said:

"Mrs. Shepherd told me to look out for you, mis'. The old man is bad off, and she couldn't come."

Ambrosia silently entered the buggy. She did not like the frowzy, impertinent youth who seemed to feel it his duty to entertain as well as drive her. Clara might surely have met her. She felt hurt and offended by the lack of courtesy.

"Clara is like every one else," she decided. "She has other interests, and I am nobody now."

It was difficult, however, to keep up this sense of injury when she was really in Clara's presence.

Clara had made so many preparations for her comfort. She had met her with open arms, and with such welcoming words that she could not by any means consider herself longer as a wronged and slighted woman. Yet that night she told Clara seriously that she was both wronged and slighted.

They were sitting together at midnight, watching the flickering-out of the vital flame in the old man calmly sleeping himself into another life. He was, indeed, so far from this life that the low conversation of the two women touched no sense of his that was yet quick. Clara had at first wondered how Ambrosia could think of all this world's restless aims and passions while such a stupendous change was happening before her eyes; but she resolved to let the selfish woman make her complaint in the very *Presence*. It must of necessity somewhat control expression, and the control of words often means, to a certain degree, the control of feeling.

"That girl is the kernel of all the trouble," said Ambrosia, after detailing, in a low, intense voice, her discovery of Meta in the doctor's laboratory. "And what would you do, Clara?"

"I would ask the doctor to send her away."

"I have begged and begged him to do so, and he says she is no more to him than his instruments or his pen and paper. He thinks, therefore, that I ought not to object, as she is useful to him."

"I think he is wrong, very wrong, because he could easily find a man who could take her place. But every one has a point at which he rebels, and I suppose Meta is the doctor's 'so far and no farther.' I feel sure that, before you asked for the dismissal of Meta, you had asked a great many unreasonable

things, and he thought he would make a stand at the girl. Very often what appears sadly wrong is nothing else but an unfortunate 'stand' of this kind. A man takes it, and then gets stubborn about it."

"He goes away to his study every night after dinner, and leaves me alone. He says he wants to read. Is that right?"

"Cannot you take an interest in the books he reads?"

"About 'germs,' and things like that? Impossible!"

"I would pretend to do so then—assume the virtue you have not. In a little time you would really like it."

"I cannot pretend. I cannot be false to myself."

"Nonsense! If the occasion pleases, we all pretend, every hour of the day! We are all players, and if our part is not always pleasant, it may be necessary. Have you seen the girl lately? Are you sure she is still in Robert's employ?"

"I have not seen her, but I know from Mrs. Ryan's insolent ways that she is still with Robert."

"St. Ange could tell you."

"I would not ask him for the world. His look said too much the day I first saw her. He is presumptuous enough. I dislike him as much as I dislike the girl; and Robert says, of course, I would dislike any one man or woman he employed. You see it looks as if it were so. But I say nothing about St. Ange, because Robert thinks it would be impossible for him to find another man so quick and sympathetic in his work. Now, as I put up with St. Ange to please Robert, I think he might dismiss Meta to please me."

"Did you ever notice a typewriter?"

"I know one when I see it."

"Learn how to use it."

"What for?"

"When you are an expert—and it is an easy thing to become an expert—offer yourself in Meta's place."

"Oh, Clara, would you do that?"

"I would. No words you could say will speak as this action will speak. It has other advantages. You are *ennuyée* and fretful with a purposeless life. This is a motive. It seems to me I could practice all day long for such an end. Think how amazed—how touched Robert will be at such perseverance!"

"I will do it! Thank you, Clara. I will get a typewriter to-morrow."

"Now let us consider things incidental to it. Do you remember Mr. Stuart, your father's lawyer?"

"We are yet good friends."

"Employ him in the matter; for it seems to me that I would make a clean sweep of the servants' quarters. I would spare none. However faithful they are to you, they are far more faithful to their own class. Does Doctor Carter often go away?"

"He is going to a physicians' dinner at Philadelphia on Thursday."

"Then Thursday is your day. Go home to-morrow. Hire new help, with instructions to come on Thursday night, and on Thursday morning clear out your petty irritations, and bring home your typewriter. You must have a teacher, but a very few lessons will do."

"You think I should clear out all the old servants?"

"Leave not one to infect the new order. No one

can tell what wicked influences you may rid yourself of in such a movement. Many a wretched household is regenerated by new servants."

"They can certainly make the house wretched, nor can any one tell exactly how they do it. Clara, I do wish I had come to you before. I am anxious now to get home and begin the work you have set me."

"And remember, dear, no one, without your own help, can break the bond between you and Robert. Nothing on earth is harder to break than a wedding-ring. Oh, Amber, there is no need to give you lessons. You can take Robert captive again with the greatest ease, if you wish; and, what is more, all the women on earth cannot take him from you unless you give them permission by foolishly aiding them."

Then the subject was dropped. Clara saw that all necessary stimulus had been given, and she turned the conversation upon Will and Bessie.

"I feel as if they had both been traitors to me," said Ambrosia, with a little temper. "Will, I dare say, has made a fool of himself. The last letter I had from him was sickening. It was 'my wife' every ten words. Bessie is and has always been an ambitious, ordering, dictatorial little thing. It was her love of ordering people made her like to go to mission chapels. She pays her money, and they let her scold and advise as much as she likes. It is too funny to see a girl in her teens lecturing a woman who has had a dozen babies."

"There is no impertinence like the impertinence of youth."

"And no presumption! Marriage is a serious thing, but Bessie first arranged her own, going

about it in a most dangerous—I may say almost immodest—way, and then she could not rest until she had got Will and Louisa married. Some one will have to put a bit on her, or she will make her parlors a bazaar for marriageable people.”

“Jack Madison will teach her a little control. That is all Bessie wants.”

“Is it? You do not know the little lady. She wants to drive the world before her.”

And to this restless babble of the world and all its cares and sorrows the old man, aweary of all, was slowly and gently passing away. After a short pause, Clara went softly to the bedside and looked at him.

“He sleeps like a little child,” she said.

“I suppose he has been very good,” remarked Ambrosia. She was not thinking of the dying man. “It does not seem a hard thing to die,” she added.

“Death is innocent of many terrors which we lay to his charge,” answered Clara. “Take away all the solemn bugbears with which we ourselves surround him—the nurses, physicians, priests, watchers, the darkened room, etc.—and what is left? Only a going to sleep.”

“Oh, Clara! Death anyway is terrible!”

“The last conscious words my father said were: ‘I am three-score-and-ten years old, and as I wait I sing the harvest-song of inward peace.’ All his life long he has been seeking for the Unseen, like a man searching the world for some lost friend. Very soon now he will find him whom his soul loveth. Is that dreadful or terrible?”

There was no answer, and after a short pause Clara said:

"You must go to bed, Amber. There is so much for you to do to-morrow—things not to be delayed—and without sleep nothing will be done wisely."

"I cannot leave you alone."

"I wish to be alone."

"Then good night. I do not know whether I shall sleep or not, but I shall think, and to-morrow I shall act."

Yet, in spite of all her anxieties, Ambrosia slept soundly. Physical necessities were paramount ones with her. In the morning, there was but little change in the condition of Clara's father, and Ambrosia was glad of it. She was eager to return home, and she fancied Clara was not eager to have her society. This was natural enough. The minds of the two women were set to two keys wide as the universe apart. Clara was tarrying with her good old father on the borderlands of being, and feeling it to be an exquisite experience. Ambrosia's heart was tossed and troubled by the gravest and strongest passions of life—love, jealousy, hatred, envy, anger, fear. She could not imagine the wondrous charm of the death-room, and she therefore thought Clara was as anxious as herself concerning the events which they had talked about.

"It was very kind of Clara to hurry me away," she thought; "for, of course, she must be awfully lonely and weary." Which reflection came from the self-consciousness of a woman who could conceive of no interests greater than her own.

She was in New York soon enough to call at her lawyer's office, and she found him in. Jealous women are seldom reticent women; and Ambrosia, feeling that this man was both a lawyer and old friend, and

also that he was much interested in her complaint, kept nothing from him. He thought Clara's advice was good, and that she ought, first of all, to free her home from all adverse people. He promised to be at her house at the noon-hour, Thursday, and told her that money for such wages as would be to pay was all that she required to trouble herself about.

The interval passed more pleasantly than usual. Amber's desire to make her husband happy explained itself in a number of those trifling things which speak most pleasantly to a man's heart. And Robert was not ungrateful. His love for his wife had a miraculous hopefulness. Also he had that singular vanity in his work which distinguishes all good workers; he could not help but believe that it must be as interesting to others as to himself. So that when Ambrosia brought a *Review* to him which contained a paper on his favorite subject, and asked him to explain a passage to her, he fell, with all the innocence of a child, into the pretty trap.

He not only explained the passage but disputed it, and then showed Ambrosia why it was wrong and he was right; and her bright face, lifted to his for instruction, seemed wonderfully fascinating. So that, after all, Ambrosia had the best of the circumstance; for if she gave her husband nearly one hour, he gave her all the rest of the evening. He listened to her last new songs, and enjoyed them. He read her a letter from Will, and told her of a piece of presumption on the part of St. Ange, and was quite pleased to let her say all the disagreeable things she wished to say about his clever assistant. And then Bessie, and the natural presumptions that might surely be expected from her, filled up the night very



pleasantly. For if a man and his wife can only unite on the same person to disapprove of, they very soon get to a condition of supreme approval of each other.

On Wednesday Ambrosia bought a new Remington, took a lesson on its use, and was so fascinated with the art that she longed to have it at once in her own private sitting-room. But there were good reasons for delaying its delivery until Thursday night, and she took no risks by disobeying them. She had also servants to look after and other things to attend to, which were necessary for the success of Thursday's emancipation scheme.

All promised well. Immediately after an early breakfast Doctor Carter left for Philadelphia. He would certainly be away until Friday evening, and he might even be later. What is there that cannot be done in New York in two whole days? She had arrayed herself very beautifully for breakfast, and Robert was elated and pleased by the circumstance. He was sure it was done to gratify him, and when he kissed Ambrosia for the attention, she smiled a pretty assurance of the compliment.

Exactly at noon Mr. Stuart appeared. He was accompanied by a man who looked exceedingly like a policeman in plain clothes, and the business of dismissal began immediately. Ambrosia took no part whatever in it. She might have been "A Statue of a Lady Reading a Novel," for any appearance of interest she showed. Mrs. Ryan's insinuations and complainings, her scorn and her anger, were but empty air to Ambrosia, who sat in the midst of her beautiful draperies, with a soft smile, reading. Mr. Stuart was very curt and adhered strictly to business. Mr. Brown, his companion, showed no evi-

dence of having anything to do with the matter, until ordered to accompany Mrs. Ryan and assist her in packing her trunks. And no objections to this order affected him. He went quietly but authoritatively with the discharged servant.

In two hours the house was empty. In three, there was another housekeeper and the various members of the new staff of servants began to arrive. Ambrosia was satisfied with herself. She had preserved her cold indifference, in the midst of words sharper than swords.

The house felt lighter after the change. There was no active ill-will and hatred to defile the atmosphere. Ambrosia wrote to Clara and thanked her and then began to busy herself about the beautiful furniture of her home. It suddenly struck her that, however fine Bessie's house might be, it could not excel hers in its noble proportions or in the wealth of rare china and carved woodwork. She was thinking of Bessie all morning, as she went with her new housekeeper through the handsome rooms, and in the afternoon she received a letter from Bessie. It was a letter full of annoyance and disappointment. Bessie was married.

"You know, Amber," she wrote, "dearest Jack not being able to live longer without seeing me, left all and came to Paris. Having seen me, he vowed he would not leave my side until I was his wife. And when I looked at my lovely wedding-gown and the diamonds Jack had brought me, I really felt that it would be flying in the face of Providence to put off wearing them. I was *real* sorry not to have your company at the altar; but, then, you managed to do without mine when you married, and I hoped I had an equal strength of character. And all the Americans of good standing, then in Paris, were present, especially Mrs. Smith-Martel, who gave me, just before the ceremony, a delight-

ful party, select and late, and the nicest sort of thing I can remember. Altogether my wedding was the finest display of the pomps and vanities I am ever likely to see. Of course, my gown was white satin. I think in no other dress would a marriage be considered legal, but it was slashed with silver and trimmed with Brussels, and the dress was made to suit my figure—which is good enough; for I simply told Worth I would not have my figure made to suit the dress. Still, I did feel bad about being married anywhere but in New York, until I was dressed; then I was reconciled to myself. For I looked my best in my bride-clothes—and so few brides do—and I made quite a sensation when I entered the church leaning on father's arm. I felt that the little murmur of admiration was a good beginning for the gown. Only one disagreeable thing happened: An envious little creature from San Francisco said she heard Jack was enormously rich, but she just knew I had not married for money. And I told her that if I had done so, the marriage could scarcely turn out worse than some love matches I have seen. And that is the truth, is it not, dear? We shall be home soon after this letter, and now that the affair is over, I do feel thankful to enter New York society as 'Mrs.' instead of Miss Madison.

"P. S. I had nearly forgotten to tell you that Will and Louisa were present. Louisa wore an exquisite gown of cream-colored cloth, trimmed with beaver; and a 'granny' muff of the same fur. And her manner is so charmingly gentle and indolently quiet that I am not astonished that Will is more infatuated than ever. I hope we shall meet very soon. 'T is a pity the sea is between us, for we shall have to cross it when the winter winds are likely to be crossing also. Good-bye.

"Your affectionate

BESSIE."

Ambrosia did not feel as if this was a nice letter. She could not define any special reasons for offense, but she felt that there were reasons. And, after all, it is so much easier to have a good orthodox envy and hatred of a cousin than it is to love her as yourself. When Robert returned, they had a pleasant, gossipy evening over the letter and the doctor's ex-

periences in Philadelphia. For Ambrosia, remembering Clara's advice, affected to be much interested in them, and did really feel a little. He was also full of praise at some changes made in the drawing-room; and they laughed a little over Will's enthrallment, and Robert wondered what his new sister would be like.

No notice was taken of any alteration in the service, nor was it probable there would be for an indefinite time. Robert was accustomed to see different men and women waiting on the table and passing through the rooms and halls. These people were the housekeeper's business; and a remark on their appearance or ability to Ambrosia was all the attention they elicited.

On the whole, the next few weeks were happy ones. Bessie came home just before Christmas, and Ambrosia was pleased that she did not make the sensation she expected to make. There were two other brides at the same time, and interest was divided and dresses were subjected to comparisons. Even Louisa detracted from Bessie's individuality of attention; for Louisa's beauty had been greatly improved by marriage, and she was wonderfully lovely in a rather unusual way. Men, weary of the assertive prettiness and exceeding cleverness of the New York girl, liked to rest themselves in the languors and silences of Louisa. Even Ambrosia declared it to be refreshing, after the agitation of self-consciousness which distinguished Mrs. Jack Madison.

Louisa and Will were in splendid apartments at the Windsor. Louisa had no desire for housekeeping. She said she preferred Will to a house, and

Will took the compliment at its face value. She gave no entertainments; she was not worried about other people; and therefore she could attend properly to herself. But no one ever imagined she was selfish. She was only devoted to Will; and Will was considerably envied by men less fortunate. Robert echoed the general opinion. He thought his new sister "delightful, lovely, and so soothing!" He said so frankly, and had no idea that his candor made Ambrosia wretched.

Yet she held her own bravely. Her sumptuous dressing befitted her noble beauty; and as Clara had been with her for some weeks, she was able to carry all her complaints to her, and keep a bright face for her husband and the general world. She had almost forgotten the episode of her change of servants, and Mrs. Ryan had passed from her memory, when, one Sunday afternoon, Robert asked his wife to ring for the woman, as he wished to speak to her.

For a moment Ambrosia hesitated, then she answered calmly:

"Mrs. Ryan has not been here for some weeks."

"Not here! Why?"

"I dismissed her."

"Indeed! For what reason?"

"For impertinence."

"You should have told me. Mrs. Ryan was an old servant. I like to know what people are in posts of trust in my house."

He spoke with an air of offense, and Ambrosia answered quickly:

"I like to know the people employed in your office. You told me I had nothing whatever to do with them."

"Then you dismissed Mrs. Ryan because I employed her granddaughter without consulting you?"

"Partly so, but mainly because of her general and constant insolence. If you wish to know the particulars, you can ask Mr. Stuart, my father's lawyer, whom I employed in the business."

"You employed a lawyer to interfere in my domestic arrangements? I think such conduct, even on your part, savors of impertinence to me."

"You said I was autocratic in the house, and claimed on this ground a right to be so in your office. I have never since made an inquiry about the people you chose to employ. I sent away all the old servants. We have been much happier and much better served with the new ones."

"Do you know Mrs. Ryan's address?"

"I know nothing about her. If you will ask Mr. Stuart all she said about you, I am sure you will say I did right."

"She would not say a word wrong of me. Mrs. Ryan was in my employ long before I married you."

"She said you adored her granddaughter. She said the girl lived *here* by your orders. She said—Oh, Robert, she said dreadful things, which I have not allowed myself to think of."

He did not answer, but his face was dark and angry, and Ambrosia continued:

"Why do you not ask the girl for the address, if it is of so much importance?"

"The girl has not been in my office for months. I want her services again. I intended to be perfectly frank with you concerning her—more fool I!"

"Robert, dear, can I not help you? I have been—"

But he rose in a passion and said scornfully:

"You help! What can a man expect from you but hindrance and annoyance? You had no right to take so much upon yourself!"

"It had come to this, Robert: I would no longer live under the same roof with the creature. Do you prefer Mrs. Ryan and her granddaughter to me? You have only to say so."

"For Heaven's sake, spare me your heroics! What question or choice can there be between you and those poor women?"

"'Poor women?' Say wicked women! They accused me to my face of infidelity to you."

"You must be mistaken."

"Ask Mr. Stuart."

"Kindly desist from thrusting a lawyer in my face. Your own words are sufficient."

"She accused me of loving St. Ange better than you; of loitering about to meet him; of dressing myself to please him—"

"Well?"

"No! It is shameful!"

"I never once entertained a doubt of you."

"That is not enough. You ought to protect me from the doubts and evil tongues of every one. I detest St. Ange; and it is true you force him on my society continually."

"As I told you before, you detest any one who is of service to me."

"I detest him, not because he is of service to you, but because he dares pity me. Yes, he dares love me! And you ought to be ashamed that you have subjected me to such suspicions."

"You have not deserved them. That is protection enough."

"I will not submit to St. Ange's company any more."

"What has he said to you?"

"Nothing—in words. But he looks at me in—"

"*Pshaw!* Every cat that looks at a king does not lose its eyes! I know St. Ange and all his vanity and the worship women give him. He is so used to 'looking' at women that he is not conscious of the act. I do not believe it would be possible for you to wrong me in a thought, and therefore I do not propose to make an Othello of myself. I would kill a man who really meant to wrong me—or you, either!"

"Will you send St. Ange away?"

"Not from the office. He is invaluable to me, and especially so at this time."

"Well, you will regret it. I have done my best—I have tried so hard—it is of no use!" Then she began to sob, and Robert rose and left the room. As he did so, he stumbled upon a group of servants, giggling and bantering, in the hall, and he flew into an outrageous passion, and sent them flying before it. For a woman may sob away her grief, but there is nothing a man can do when he is in trouble but abuse somebody.

Half an hour afterward, Clara entered the room. The atmosphere was yet electrical and unhappy, and the weeping wife on the sofa explained in some measure the occasion. Clara sat down by her side, a little fretful herself at the intrusion of such unsabbath conditions. And Ambrosia dried her eyes and, with burning cheeks, repeated the aggravating conversation. This time, Clara did not blame her at all. She only wondered at the stupidity of man,

and promised herself and Ambrosia that Robert Carter should hear a little reason from her lips.

"But why are you making a baby of yourself?" she asked sharply. "That is not the way to manage any unreasonable man. Go and wash your face, and meet your husband fairly and squarely. You are right, and in his heart he knows you are right. That is the reason he tried to hide his injustice in a show of bad temper. I am going now to talk to Robert. I think he will listen to me."

She received no answer to her first tap at the library door, but as soon as she spoke Robert said:

"Come in, Clara!"

She found him standing at the window, gazing into the dreary street. He did not see the dripping rain, nor the wet pavements, nor the casual figures under the damp umbrellas passing before his eyes. He was feeling too much to see anything exterior to his feelings. He looked miserable, and Clara was more sorry for him than she was for Ambrosia; first, because Ambrosia's weak selfishness and want of tact irritated her; second, because women always pity a suffering man more than they pity a sufferer of their own sex. Trouble and tears are in some way considered the natural lot of women; in the lot of men they are apparently abnormal and accidental.

Yet Clara certainly considered Robert to be in fault, and she told him so. She declared Ambrosia to have been justified in dismissing Mrs. Ryan. She thought she had every womanly reason for opposing the employment of the girl Meta. And she certainly was quite within her rights in demanding the exclusion of St. Ange from her house.

Robert listened with some impatience.

"It seems, then," he answered, "that I have no rights. I may not interfere about the servants in the house."

"No, you should not," interrupted Clara. "You had told Amber they were her province, and you would not have thought of being angry about Mrs. Ryan had she not been a relative of that girl. Would you?"

Robert was silent.

"Would you, Robert? Answer truly."

"That girl was very useful to me. She had learnt the technical terms; she knew my method of composition; she could wait without a movement for my thoughts, however slow they were; she often suggested just the word I wanted."

"And she was very pretty!"

"I give you my word, Clara, I thought no more of her beauty than I did of the beauty of my silver inkstand. She suited me, in a business way, and I valued her."

"But when you found out that her presence troubled Amber, you ought to have dismissed her at once. It would have saved a deal of domestic sorrow, and there are ten thousand people in the city able to take her place. Is there *one* you could put in the place of Amber? Which, then, ought to have been considered?"

"There is no comparison. The one woman is my wife; the other was a piece of office furniture—a necessity of my business."

"Robert, I will tell you a little secret: Amber has been practicing the typewriter for some weeks. She is now very expert, and she is hoping to be of great use to you."

"What nonsense! What utter nonsense! The typewriter is but a secondary thing, and of no use whatever without a very quick and intelligent application of stenography. Who set her upon this piece of folly?"

"I did. I found her *ennuyée* and nervous to the last point. She had no vital interest in her life. I gave her this hope, and she seized it with a pitiful eagerness. It has done her a world of good. Do not be a cruel, blundering, practical man and tell her it is all 'utter nonsense.' That would be almost wicked. Think of the hours she has worked and encouraged herself with the idea of pleasing and surprising you. Give her something to copy, no matter how useless; only let her think she is helping you."

"Clara, that is altogether wrong and foolish; it is a very false position."

"Oh, Robert, it is so often the great wisdom to forget we are wise and grandly truthful and just be a little foolish. And about St. Ange—do send him away."

"He is absolutely necessary to me for a few weeks. We are in the midst of experiments to which he holds all the threads. It is wicked to interfere with studies of such importance for a mere whim of personal dislike."

"She says St. Ange infers, hesitates, suggests a love for herself and a pity for her position, which doubly insults her. Surely, this is a thing for you to feel very keenly."

"No! I do not care for St. Ange's vanity. It is inordinate. No one believes anything he says concerning women. I trust Amber implicitly. She knows it. I have asked her to treat St. Ange's

childish pretensions with the contemptuous indifference which is all they deserve. I have explained to her how necessary he is to me at present. As soon as I can supply his place I intend to do so; in the meantime, if Amber loves me, she may well endure a little personal annoyance for the sake of investigations promising so much good to humanity, so much fame to myself.

"I think you are wrong. I feel you are wrong."

"Oh, if it comes to *feeling*, I am at a loss for arguments. I thought you would look at the matter sensibly."

"I am a woman, and I feel and think and reason as a woman. I am sorry for Amber. I know she has looked forward to this afternoon, all week. It was the very time she had chosen to show what she could do to please you. She was expecting love and praise, and now I know she is in the very depths of disappointment and despair. Go and talk to her."

"She is so unreasonable—"

"You made her so. In the first months of your married life you treated her like a goddess. All her commands were obeyed; all her wishes granted. That was wrong. I hate to see a husband on his knees to a wife. And if the wife was wise, she would hate it also; for such adorers, sooner or later, are apt to rise to their feet, and then, likely as not, they walk away altogether. Robert, you love Amber and she loves you. That is a platform wide enough for all reconciliations. She is woefully disappointed and discouraged. Go and speak kindly and comfortably to her."

"Amber's faults—"

"Oh, it is a sin against nature to talk of your wife's

faults. Any quarrel must be judged by the points at which it violates love, justice, decency, etc. It is not Amber. It is the wrong to love and justice."

"Amber is to blame entirely."

"No, sir! You must not teach yourself to believe such a thing. It is not true."

"Then I see no reason for believing that acids will make salts when they unite with alkalies or that the sun will rise to-morrow."

"There is no use talking to a man who can speak of acids and alkalies in the same breath as his wife. It is Sabbath afternoon, Robert; a good day to try to reach again that sweet, unselfish love which is the image of the Infinite Love."

"I do not think any earthly love is *that*, Clara. I loved Amber when I married her, with all my soul. Our love has been too peculiarly finite to be an image of infinite love."

"Yet it is only by going into the finite on all sides that we advance into the infinite. Oh, Robert, go to Amber and be at peace! Domestic strife is like living with a dragon."

"I know that, Clara."

He had sat down and his face was hid in his hands. So Clara left him.

After a little, he rose up and began to read over some proof-sheets, but it was a hopeless task. He laid them down, and lifted a letter he wished to answer at length. He could get no further than "My dear Professor." His heart was stronger than his mind. Feeling dominated thought. Ambrosia ruled even while she antagonized him. He walked about. He opened the door and shut it again. He tidied the loose papers upon his desk, and then opened the

door again. There was a sound of music, and he was curious. Ambrosia had played so little lately. He could not believe it was she—now—after such annoyance.

So he walked slowly toward the drawing-room. The door was open. He wondered if she had purposely left it open, that he might hear her at the piano. Then he asked himself why she would do this. Either it would be to provoke him by an affected appearance of being quite happy, independent of his pleasure, or else might want him to understand that she was no longer cross, that she was willing to bury all hard words in song, that, in fact, she wished to call him to her. He paused at the open door to consider which of these two motives was the more likely to have ruled her.

He could see her graceful figure, with the head a little drooped. He could see her small hands slowly wandering up and down the notes. Her attitude was thoughtful and melancholic, her touch irresolute. He was about to enter the room, when she struck a few chords and, to a clear, eager melody, sang, as if singing only to her own heart :

“ Dear, if I to thee could bring
Any gift that holds no sting,
Any cause for joy, the years
Never should transmute to tears.
I should tread where none have trod—
None—except the Very God !”

The words went home like a nail struck by a master workman. None, truly, but the “Very God” could give a gift without a sting or a joy that would not sometimes be dimmed with tears. Amber felt it. As she sang she lifted her head. It was as if

she appealed from his hasty judgment to that of the "Very God." He entered, closed the door softly and went to her side.

And, oh, the sweet mystery of forgiveness, when heart meets heart and two are one without explanations and without conditions! Ambrosia was only the beloved wife at this hour. She never defended herself, and she never reproached him. She only said such sweet, humble, affectionate things as break men's stubborn wills all to pieces and make them feel what a dreadful thing it is to measure love by prudence or justice or business or fame or, indeed, by any earthly thing but Love's own self.

And after this state had been attained, it was an easy, a delightful thing to watch her clever manipulation of the mechanical alphabet, and to tell her she had accomplished a wonder and would be of the greatest use to him. Was there not a whole box full of "observations" that ought to have been copied months ago? So, when Clara came down to dinner, she found them both childishly happy; and if once or twice a traitor suspicion of being in a fool's paradise did cross Robert's mind, he said to it promptly:

"Let me alone to-night! Let me alone!"



CHAPTER XVII.

TREADING ON A HEART.

Two glances, which together would rejoice
In love, now lost like stars beyond dark trees :
Two hands apart, whose touch alone gives ease.

* * * * *

Such are we now ! Ah, may our hopes forecast
Indeed one hour again, when on this stream
Of darkened love, once more the light shall gleam.

—*Rossetti.*

Even the merciful Christ recognized in his rule of seventy times seven that there must be a limit to human forbearance ; and those who value love ought to understand that it is dangerous to approach this limit. Before it is even on the horizon, how much sweetness has become bitterness ; how much tenderness and respect has been lost by the way ! And what a long, hard road back it must be, to that first happy trysting-place of two lives !

The morning light with its call to thought and labor brought something of this feeling to both Robert and Ambrosia. Neither of them made any effort to define it ; they only felt that they were in the shadow of the wrong road, and that this assur-

ing of each other that the sun is shining, did not in reality make it shine. Robert's very first considerations referred to that abortive typewriting. He was sure that the false position it compelled him to take was all wrong. He was angry at Clara for inciting Ambrosia to make such a claim upon his time and forbearance; Angry at Ambrosia for putting herself in such a fictitious relationship to him and to his work. He expected from her the sympathy of a wife, and he had to humor her as if she were a sick child. He thought of these things as he dressed, and they made him sorry for himself; and imparted a flavor of personal injury to his attitude and speech, which the most scrupulous regard to polite forms did not hide. Ambrosia could not misunderstand the situation, but Clara resented her opinions with some irritation.

"Robert is not cross," she insisted; "he is only full of professional cares. He ought to be so, and it is not right of you to call business 'crossness.' Cannot you be content to let 'well alone,' Amber? I assure you it is an easy thing to make any man cross by perpetually accusing him of bad temper."

"He never spoke this morning of the papers I was to copy for him. I do not believe he wants me to help him."

"Do you think that your copying was all he had to remember this morning? I could see that his book was full of engagements. My dear Amber, you must not imagine that the world turns on its axis for you and for you only."

"Even you are unkind to me lately, Clara."

"A complaining woman finds every one unkind that will not complain with her. I saw nothing

wrong this morning in Robert's behavior; it was precisely that of a man overcrowded with business cares. I have no doubt the papers will be here in an hour."

"I do not care now whether they come or not. They were evidently papers of no great value, or Robert would have remembered them and given me some directions about the copy. And I do not think he will send them to-day at all. You will see."

"I had a letter from Bessie this morning. She wishes to speak to me about a 'little bit of business,' she says. Will you go with me, dear?"

"I dare say it is something Bessie does not want me to know. You had better go alone."

"Bessie is well aware that I have no secrets from you. Dress and come with me. It will do you good, Amber."

"Your invitation shows that you no more believe in Robert's promise than I do. However, I will pay him the compliment of waiting for the papers. He will not send them."

"Do not prophesy evil and disappointment for yourself. Come with me. You will find the papers here when you return. A visit to Bessie will be better for you than sitting still, watching and waiting."

"No. I will do my duty and remain at home. They may come; though I do not believe they will."

"Have you any message for Bessie?"

"No."

"Then 'good-bye' for a few hours. After I have seen Bessie, there is some shopping for the farm to do. I am going home to-morrow."

"Clara! You shall not go."

"Indeed I shall. I make things worse instead of better here. Until you can feel 'I am Robert,' and Robert can feel 'I am Amber,' I do not expect happiness will come to either of you. Separate interests make separate lives; and you are not one but two. Oh, Amber, do not cry again! Even I am weary of so much weeping; and I can tell you that your fine eyes are being ruined by the habit."

"'Habit!' I like that. People should not get the 'habit' of wounding me."

"Good-bye! You will be busy and happy 'copying' when I return."

"Do not go back to Mayberry, Clara—not just yet."

"I can do no good here, Amber, and I may do harm. In this matter, I must do as I think right. Do not work too hard, or you will have a headache, and that spoils everything."

Ambrosia smiled scornfully at the advice. In her heart she was sure she would not work at all. And when people perversely bespeak for themselves the evil they apprehend, they generally get their foreboding. No papers came, and no message or apology. She could hardly tell whether she was sorry or glad. Robert had not taken her attempt to help him with the enthusiasm she expected. She had lost all faith in the plan, and therefore all interest in the carrying of it out. And besides there was the pleasure of saying to Clara: 'I told you so,' which pleasure is one of the greatest unacknowledged satisfactions in life.

Clara was very late home. The short winter day was over, and the lamps on the Avenue lighted. She

returned in the Madisons' carriage, and was quite smiling and excited, for a woman so calm and equable. Amber was dressed for dinner, and was sitting idly in the drawing-room. She had been musing on many unsatisfactory things, mainly, however, on Will and the loss of his company and influence. He did not come often to see her now, and when he did come Louisa was always with him; for Louisa had the tact Ambrosia, with all her cleverness, lacked. Louisa had fallen with the greatest ease into Will's peculiarities. That very afternoon they had paid her a visit as they returned from a "meeting" at which Will had been chairman and opened the proceedings with a little speech; and Louisa had contrived to make him feel that the onward march of Social Virtues depended upon him. The special subject had been one about which few women could feel any living interest, but Louisa was not confounded by that circumstance. When Ambrosia asked her puzzling questions, she had only to smile at Will adoringly, and request him to answer Ambrosia's difficulties; because "he is so clever; and people must understand him." And though Will did not see through the flattery, Ambrosia did; and she despised him for his conceited acceptance of such patent blandishments.

Yet for all that, as she sat thinking and thinking, she acknowledged to herself the wisdom of Louisa's tactics. She knew that whenever she followed similar ones with Robert, they had always been a success; and she wondered whether it was now too late to affect the interest in his work which he was always so glad to receive. Would Robert believe in it now? Once he would have felt sure it was a true

sympathy ; but there had been many "enlightening words" since that time.

Clara interrupted these speculations. She looked at Ambrosia, and Ambrosia said with an air of infallible injury—"I told you they would not come."

"I am sure there is good reason for the neglect. Robert will explain."

"I shall not ask for explanations. How is Bessie?"

"Very well. She sent her love to you."

"And the 'business?' Is she going to draw up a new Social Code—or depose the rector—or run Jack for the Presidency?"

"She is going to give twelve entertainments—card parties, dances and three large dinners. Mr. Madison says her youth and inexperience require the support and advice of some adept in such matters ; and he has asked me to stay with Bessie for the next three months."

"The idea! Bessie the Wise! The Wonderful! The Popular Young Matron! Bessie requiring counsel or help of any kind! It is inconceivable! What did you say?"

"I have agreed to remain three months with her."

"That is too bad, Clara! It is a shame! You said you could not remain with me."

"I told you why. I can do no good here, and I am miserable in an atmosphere of discord and discontent."

"I suppose you told Bessie that?"

"You suppose nothing of the kind, Amber."

"You said you were going to Mayberry."

"Because Mayberry seemed this morning to be the only alternative. I am not anxious to go there

this bleak winter weather. Mayberry is not a cheerful place."

"But do not go to Bessie! Stay with me, Clara."

"Mr. Madison has offered me one thousand dollars to stay with Bessie. You see it is a business transaction. I am poor. A thousand dollars lift a great weight off my mind."

"You never would take money from Robert and me."

"Anything I could do for you was a service of Love. I would not take money for such service. It is different with Mr. Madison. He offers me one thousand dollars because he knows I can give Bessie its full value in many ways."

"Well! It is only another blow! They come fast and thick. First, Bessie takes Will from me. Then, she takes you. All this winter in society she has pushed me aside. People have refused my dinners and gone to hers. They have praised her house and her gowns and her little dances to my very face and never said a pleasant word of mine. Miss Radway used to be my friend; she is now Bessie's. I used to be constantly noticed in the *Home Journal*; now the *Home Journal* gives itself up to Bessie. The rector of St. Philips used to come to me for help in the church fairs and decorations; now he goes to Bessie. Why does she not also take Robert from me? He is all I have left."

During this rapid, inconsequent complaint, Clara sat looking dismally into the fire. She knew argument was a useless prolonging of lament and regret. She was almost inclined to let the selfish accusation pass without defense; but, after a short silence, Am-

brosia asked sharply: "Well, then? Is it not so, Clara?"

"No," she answered. "No. Will never belonged to you. He could not, therefore, be taken from you. He is to-day what he has always been—your affectionate brother-in-law. No one has taken me from you. I am this hour what I have ever been—your faithful friend. Ladies who refused your entertainments had been previously disappointed in your acceptance of their invitations—you told me this yourself. It is not good form to praise anything you have or do to your face. You never subscribed to the *Home Journal*; it tired of unrecognized civilities. Bessie takes twelve copies of it. You snubbed Miss Radway more than once in my presence, and the rector has found out that you are moody and unreliable. The world is like a looking-glass, Amber; it shows you back the face you show to it."

"However, do not go to Bessie. I cannot bear the idea."

"It is a great piece of good fortune to me. It fills my slender purse and pays my obligations. You ought to rejoice with me."

"I wish I had two thousand dollars! I would give it to you to stay away from Bessie."

"Do you indeed think so meanly of me? Do you imagine I would take any money merely to gratify an envious, jealous disposition? Amber, it is just such reckless insults that drive away all love from your side."

Into this element of disapproval and disappointment, Robert—weary and dissatisfied with his day's efforts—came. Clara was grieved and silent. Amber was in that polite, don't-care-for-anything mood

which always depressed every one with whom she came in contact. Before dinner was over, the very man waiting on them was infected by its influence and passed the *patés* and the coffee with a dejected, downcast melancholy, which it was impossible not to feel.

Suddenly Robert remembered the papers; then he knew what was the matter. And to apologize for forgetfulness is never an easy thing. He said truly that he had found an important case waiting for him, and that he had been hurried from duty to duty all day, until his exhaustion reminded him of the dinner hour. But he perceived that the explanation was a lame one, so far as Ambrosia and Clara were concerned. They believed him, but they thought of the proverb, "Where there is a will there is a way," and he felt the influence of the thought, though it was unspoken.

Later in the evening Ambrosia told her husband of Mr. Madison's offer to Clara.

"And Clara has accepted it," she added with a sigh.

"She has done right."

"She would not stay with us."

"I do not blame her. We gave her no pleasure; we offered her no money. Why should she waste her life in our house?"

"I thought she loved me."

"You expect too much from Love, Amber. Love is elastic, but it may be strained too far."

"Yes," she answered, nodding brightly back.

"We both have that fault, Robert."

Then he laughed, and the laugh cleared the fog away, and the evening went pleasantly onward.

For Ambrosia began to be chatty and agreeable, and Robert could never resist her in such a mood. She criticised Bessie and ridiculed St. Ange and imitated Will's uxorious adoration of his wife, and scintillated with those little unkind remarks about all their acquaintance which every one likes very well to hear.

The next day the delayed papers for "copy" were sent early. Ambrosia looked at them suspiciously. She saw they were what she called "ancient." If they were really of importance, why had they been suffered to lie in an unfinished condition so long? Then, as she proceeded to make them fair and intelligible, she was met by constant difficulties—ellipses, contractions and technical expressions of which she could make neither sense nor reason. It appeared to her that whole sheets were lost or had got mixed up with other sheets to which they had no reference. In spite of her eager desire to do excellent work, she could not avoid the depressing feeling that it was utterly useless work.

This supposition was strengthened by the fact that Robert did not trouble himself by its correctness. He asked indeed how she was getting on with the work, and said: "That is splendid"—and then dismissed the subject. Every day she became more and more certain that she was being deceived and played with in a matter so vital to herself.

One day, after a week's disappointing work, she met with some difficulties beyond her power to unravel. She had spoken of similar ones several times and felt that Robert found the explanation to be very tiresome. Her heart failed her; she covered the instrument hastily, threw the papers into a drawer and went out to pay some calls. Every-

where she was met with the same expressions of polite wonder or polite satisfaction, regarding the assistance of Bessie by Mrs. Shepherd. So proper! So admirable! Did she notice how delightfully the Madison dinner passed? No delays and equally no hurry. How efficient the service! How noiseless! How well arranged the minutest details! And what could Amber do but agree with all said?

A few such calls were sufficient to put her out of humor with the world and herself, and, as she was gloomily riding down the Avenue, she passed Bessie's carriage. Clara was with her; but both heads were bent over something in Bessie's hand. They were smiling and talking and so occupied with their affairs, that they never saw Ambrosia. There was no reason that she should take any offense at this circumstance; but she did feel hurt and humbled, and she had a crushing sense of defeat.

She told herself that Bessie had every fault she had—she was just as self-willed, just as selfish, just as dictatorial. How was it then that every one liked Bessie, and no one really liked her? She declared that she could not understand it; and yet the reason was plain enough. Bessie took the trouble to hide her faults under the authorized disguises. Bessie could cloak her self-will under charming little flatteries, and by the offer of resignations no one would think of accepting. Her selfishness was perhaps really greater than Ambrosia's, but she had a variety of veils for it; and when no veil was possible, she could ask for her desire "as a great favor," or prettily hector or bluff it with jokes and smiles until submission to her was a pleasure.

In fact, Bessie condescended to use the various

weapons with which Nature has endowed woman. She liked to win her way by the cajoleries, the wit, the underhand compliments and the open flatteries which make maid or wife invincible. Ambrosia stood upon her beauty and her rights, forgetting that both husband and friends may be pleased to grant a favor or bestow a gift where they would sulk over the same grant if asked as a due and refuse the same gift if demanded as a right.

St. Ange came home with the doctor to dinner, and it annoyed Ambrosia. The man offended her in every way, and he, this night, prevented the confidential talk she had hoped to have with her husband. In fact, the talk was mostly professional; but Ambrosia's sensitive self-esteem whispered to her that St. Ange had been asked for that very reason. She suspected that Robert had feared the typewriter and its explanations. She suspected it still more when, after dinner, Robert asked her to play and St. Ange to accompany the music. "Anything rather than give himself to my society," she thought. "He will even annoy me with a man I detest;" and when she turned from the piano and found Robert had fallen asleep under the influence of the music, she was ready to cry with vexation.

St. Ange looked at the sleeping man with an unmistakable contempt, and then he looked at Ambrosia. There was a great deal in the look, far more than she ought to have seen or than she desired to see.

"Will Mrs. Carter play again the 'Nocturne' for my sake?" he asked in a low voice.

"No," she answered; "I am weary. I was playing for Doctor Carter, and it seems that he also is

weary. I will not disturb him. Sleep is better than music."

The words were politely scornful, and she rose from the instrument and walked with a nonchalant air to a table on which stood a reading-lamp. A chair and some illustrated papers were convenient, and she sat down and screened her face with the pictured pages. Her whole attitude was that of a wife protecting the rest of an exhausted husband. If St. Ange spoke, she answered only in whispered monosyllables; and when he finally said he must really go, she only moved her handsome head in an acquiescent bow,

But, oh, how hot and angry her heart was! Though she neither moved nor spoke, she was arraigning her husband with a pitiless justice that listened to no extenuating circumstances. "The man has either an insane trust in my affection for him, or he is totally indifferent both to my honor and his own," she thought. "Most women would have indulged themselves in a little flirtation with so handsome and sympathetic a lover, and Robert may try even me too far. I wonder"—then she let her thoughts drift, and the way they took she did not care conscientiously to follow. She sat passive until they came sneaking back to her recognizance, and the only answer she made to their dumb suggestions was:

"It would serve him right, if I did!"

Whatever this contemplated revenge was, she sat brooding over it until Robert sprang to his feet with a sense of having been recreant in some duty.

"I beg your pardon, Amber," he said, coming toward her. "I have been asleep. How very rude

and unkind. You were playing for me, too. Will you forgive me? I am so tired."

"It is immaterial."

"Where is St. Ange?"

"I dismissed him."

"I am sorry. I wanted him again. Have I slept long?"

"About an hour and a half."

"I wish you had kept St. Ange. I wanted him to correct some notes."

For a few moments she did not answer; then a perverse determination to know the truth—which is often the same thing as knowing the worst—came forcibly to her; and she said;

"Robert, I can neither make beginning nor end of the papers I am now copying. I wish you would come to my room and look over what I have done, and tell me how to go on."

"Oh, not to-night, Amber."

"But I can copy no further without help. Come, Robert."

"I really cannot to-night. I am tired out. Do have some consideration."

"Do you wish me to go on with the work?"

"Please yourself. Work that I have to direct and correct is very tiresome. I might as well do it with my own hands."

"You had to direct and correct 'that girl's' copy, I suppose?"

"Of course, at first. For that reason I very naturally dislike to change a person whom I had taught the methods of my work."

"I do not believe the papers you have given me to copy are of any value."

Robert was silent.

"One of them is dated ten years ago. As far as I can judge, the results specified are far behind time."

"They are."

"And you do not care anything about them!"

"How do you know that, Amber?"

"I am sure of it, Robert. Do you think I am a child or a fool? You have offered me a great insult; first, in supposing I have not intelligence enough to perceive these papers were premature and had been long superseded; second, in using my time and strength as you would use that of a meddling imbecile who must be employed on something or anything to keep her out of mischief!"

"I told Clara the situation was all wrong."

"Oh! Clara is in it also?"

"In it! What do you mean? Clara told me that you had learned to use a typewriter for my sake and begged me not to disappoint you. Typewriting without stenography is as useless as Chaldaic to me. I did the best I could. I told Clara it was a false position."

"So both Clara and you have been making a baby of me—giving me a toy to keep me in good humor. And I dare say Clara has told Bessie; and you have complained to St. Ange; and I am a private laughing-stock for as many as Bessie and others like to laugh with. It is a shame! There is no excuse for such treatment!"

"I meant nothing but kindness, Amber. The papers were fading out."

"They ought to be burnt."

"They are interesting records of my first experiments."

"Put them in the fire."

"You may put them in the fire if you wish."

"I thought so. It is intolerable to be fooled by you, Robert! I could have borne it better from any one else."

"I tell you I meant to be kind."

"You sent the papers to me, as you would give a rattle to a crying baby. You ought to have explained about the stenography. Am I so irrational that I cannot bear the truth? Oh, Robert! Robert!"

"It was wrong. It was a mistake, Amber. I never approved myself for deceiving you. It was always a great trial to further the deceit by noticing the work at all. I do not wonder you detected my indifference to it. I was more than indifferent; I was angry at the position it forced me to take."

"And I am angry also! You had no right to put me in such a position. You ought to have told me the truth."

"I will tell you the truth now. I dislike seeing you at the typewriter. You are out of your sphere. You are my wife, my friend and my companion. You are not my typewriter. You lost caste in my eyes by the mechanical employment; you put yourself among associations derogatory to the ideal I had always kept of you. My wife is my wife; she is mistress of my heart and home. I did not like to see you my servant in any capacity. And the sound of a typewriter in my house is unpleasant to me; it is bringing the office into my hours of rest; and I do not like it! I do not like it at all!"

He spoke with haste and with gathering passion, and Ambrosia perceived that in his eyes she had been altogether wrong in the matter. She under-

stood now the indefinite lowering of his usual fine manner toward her. But all the same, she thought he ought to have let the motive ennoble the act. Love should have glorified the mistake and glorified her in it. But that expectation, though beautiful in theory, rarely if ever succeeds in reality. Even in housekeeping duties, the wife who makes herself a domestic woman is too often treated like a domestic.

After his angry definition of the situation, Robert rose and moved the periodicals about the table and the music on the piano like a man looking for something he had lost. He thought it was his reading-glasses; it was in reality a loss so great that he could not define it. And he was worried and astonished at the attitude of Ambrosia. She contradicted at this hour all his previous conceptions of her character. He had been sure that whenever this explanation came, it would be with a passion of tears and reproaches; and for this ebullition he had prepared himself. But he was not prepared for the dry-eyed anger and the proud look of injury and injustice which enveloped like an atmosphere the beautiful woman sitting motionless before him. He wished her to speak, to make some movement, and she appeared to have forgotten that he was in the room. She was more aggravating than the old, impulsive, demonstrative Ambrosia.

At length he went to the door, opened it and, as he stood with the handle in his hand, said: "Good night, Amber! I hope you will have forgotten this little affair by the morning."

She did not move nor answer him; but when he had closed the door, she whispered: "*Forgotten—this little affair—by the morning!*"

Robert did not see his wife in the morning at all. Her maid said she had been restless all night and had not fallen asleep until the hour for rising. But the circumstance did not trouble Robert much. He was thankful to be rid of such a disagreeable deception; and he fully expected the domestic storm would blow over before night. He knew it was Ambrosia's reception day, and doubtless something would happen to make her forget his offense.

Yet he found it impossible to be at peace with himself. The look on his wife's face, when he told her to put the papers in the fire, haunted him. It was the look of a proud woman who had received a lash. He wished too he could forget her eyes; the reproach and the wounded love in them were troublesome. What had he done wrong, he asked himself, fretfully. And something within him answered: "Put your foot on a woman's heart! That is all." And it was not a pleasant thought to carry all day with him.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VIPER IN THE BREAST.

We shape ourselves the joy or fear
Of which the coming life is made,
And fill our future's atmosphere
With sunshine or with shade. —*Raphael.*

There are hours in every life that are transforming, and Ambrosia had come to such a fateful time. Something had happened, and she was a different woman. She could now see the Ambrosia that "had been" as others doubtless saw her, and she frowned at the phantom woman. Her memory was busy, though she did not take note of its labor; and she felt a weight of sorrow upon her heart, though she asked not whether it was the bearing of the old sorrow or the boding of some new harvest of tares.

Worn out with the tumult of the night, she slept long and heavily; and when consciousness returned her first remembrance was of a certain look in her husband's eyes when she answered his question about St. Ange. At the time she had taken no special note of it, but the first thought of the morning is often a revealing thought, and she knew now that this look was the most important thing that had happened. Robert was at last jealous. He might not

yet be aware of the feeling; but he was jealous. There was no doubt of it. She remembered clearly the anger and doubt in the glance he gave her, when she said of St. Ange: "I dismissed him."

She was correct in her judgment. Those three words had roused instant and involuntary queries in Robert's heart. Why did Ambrosia dismiss him? Had the conceited fellow presumed too far? If so, could such presumption have come without previous unwarrantable license? Why was he not awakened? Was it possible that Ambrosia's antipathy was an affected one? "At any rate," he thought, "dishonor comes too near when it even dares question a woman at all."

At the time he had refrained himself from giving any voice to his suspicions, because they were so startlingly new to him that he could not determine whether they were worthy of consideration or not. But he did know that Ambrosia would resent them in a way which would very likely induce unpardonable recrimination. So he took the doubt and the queries arising from it to bed with him, and slept the sleep such companions give.

In a measure Ambrosia divined the situation, and it gratified her. "I hope he is jealous," she thought. "He deserves the lonely, wretched pain. He said I was jealous without cause. Now let him be jealous without cause. He will find out that an imaginary cause can give a deal of suffering." And, without conscious intention, she permitted herself the pleasure of playing to this card. If she met St. Ange while driving, she asked him to accompany her. Robert had often asked St. Ange to dinner to please himself; Ambrosia now asked him, to annoy Robert.

The evenings were spent in music, and Robert now watched instead of sleeping. He watched, and, of course, he saw many suspicious signs—many covert meanings in the words of the songs sung. Their hands met in the turning of the pages. There were directions given by the upward glancing of Ambrosia or the downward glancing of St. Ange, that seemed preposterously uncalled-for. Did the jealous ever lack food for suspicion? Robert now found, even in the familiarities he had encouraged, plenty of material to set his heart on fire. He tried to speak to Ambrosia about St. Ange. She shrugged her shoulders and turned the subject, and he had not the courage to pursue it. But he suffered more and more every day, and Ambrosia appeared to be quite unconscious of his annoyance. For she did not do or say a single thing beyond the limits given by her previous relations with St. Ange. It was only that Robert had begun to see them in a new light, both as regarded himself and the world. But how could he now complain of St. Ange's frequent presence in his house and at his table? How make objections to his presents of flowers or to his accompaniments on the violin? Had he had permitted such familiarities, and what reason but one could he admit for objecting to their continuance? Ambrosia gave him nothing to found a complaint on; and yet he was not satisfied. In fact, he watched his wife and St. Ange in about the same miserable anxiety that a man bitten by a sick dog watches for evidence of rabies.

He could find nothing in Ambrosia's attitude on which to ground a reasonable complaint. And yet there was a difference. She was seen more fre-

quently in public with the handsome young doctor. The man himself was sensible that his company was not repulsed, as it had been ; and in the vanity of his heart he believed that tolerance might become something warmer. For that Ambrosia might be making a tool of him was an incapable conception to a man so confident of his own "fatal beauty."

Alas, how easily things grow wrong, and then grow worse ! One little advance permitted to a dishonorable lover makes so many others possible. St. Ange lost no opportunity that offered for showing himself with his patron's wife. He was so vile, that he kept encouraging his hopes with the proverb, "Give a dog a bad name, and then you may hang him ;" only he read it thus, "Give a woman a bad name, and you may make her reckless enough to deserve it." For this end he haunted Ambrosia's presence and, seen or unseen by her, threw into his face and manner the adoration of a lover.

In the meantime he was made to feel that there was a great change in his business relations to Doctor Carter. He perceived that the latter was jealous and was glad of the circumstance. He had a belief that it was her husband's unbounded trust in her fidelity that made Ambrosia so careful hitherto not to abuse such unqualified faith. A quarrel might precipitate events. And if a chance is given to evil, it is able to procure itself other chances. For day after day Robert, being unable to endure St. Ange's presence in the office, coldly excused it ; and thus provided for the traitor the opportunities he desired. Nor was the unhappy husband oblivious of this effect ; only he thought that if Ambrosia was true, she would be true under all circum-

stances; and if not—No—he had no proof of “not.” He would not carry on an argument that was based upon “not.”

Part of February and all of March went on in the miserable uncertainty which Robert had so long and so carefully—or rather so carelessly—prepared. He began now to understand why “the appearance of evil” ought to be so scrupulously avoided—began to see that an “appearance of evil” only was quite able to blight the happiness of heaven and stain the good name of an angel of light. How foolish he had been! How reckless! What temptation he had thrown Amber into! If the dear woman had withstood it, how proud he ought to be of her! If she had not withstood it—certainly Ambrosia was being well avenged for all the unnecessary pain Robert had given her about the girl Meta.

She partly understood this, and a womanly instinct which she did not examine led her to make the uttermost of her attractions. Never had she dressed with more taste and splendor, never had she been so evenly tempered, so generally pleasant, so calm and so considerate. She did not now ask Robert to leave his studies and go out with her; but she came to him always before going, “because she wished to have his admiration before all others.” She came to him after every entertainment, and drove even jealousy away with her confidences and her witty descriptions of the people she had seen. She seemed suddenly to have cast off her girlish imperfections and to have become a woman—a nobly-planned woman, not too bright or good,

“For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles.”

How could he have been so careless of such a treasure? he now remorsefully asked himself.

One morning, toward the end of March, Bessie made an early morning call upon Ambrosia. It was now a most unusual attention, and Ambrosia received it from the first with suspicion as to its motive. Yet Bessie came in radiant and full of the importance of her position as the giver of a most successful series of entertainments.

"Clara sends you a thousand kisses, dear. I wish I could give you them. You do look *so* charming this morning. For whom is your loveliness adorned? I saw you last night at the opera, and how bored you did look! And how nervous St. Ange was! His glass was here and there and everywhere."

"I was bored. And all men are nervous unless they are at business."

"More nervous than women?"

"A good deal."

"I do not think so at all, Amber."

"Then you have not observed. Put six men and six women on chairs with chintz covers. When the women rise, the covers will be quite correct; the men will have fidgeted theirs out of all shape; and it will be a miracle if they have left a head-rest or a lace tidy in its place. And please to notice a lady and a gentleman sitting at a table covered with knick-knacks—the lady will not touch once; the gentleman will lift a particular piece and nervously finger it all the time he is talking to you. I know, for I have often been in a fever for the sake of some of my rareties. As for St. Ange, his vanities call for the firmest self-control; and always call in vain."

"Mrs. Moulton told me she meets you and St. Ange every morning, riding in the Park."

"Has Mrs. Moulton 'reserved' the Park? It is her business to make more mistakes than the facts admit of."

"What *are* you reading, Amber? Surely not *that book!* Jack says none of Z——'s books are proper."

"Jack Madison is not set in authority over me—and I have a natural pleasure in reading books that are not as good as the ten commandments."

"But still there are so many good and great writers."

"I do not like good and great writers. I prefer mediocre writers. They are not obtrusively thrust upon you. You are not obliged to know them. You make their acquaintance to please yourself."

"I met Arabella Minton as I came here. One may always be sure of meeting her. She has the 'key of the streets' from ten in the morning till nearly sunset. Her mother ought to restrain that girl a little."

"She is young and very pretty."

"And is given her head."

"Just as well so; for she will take it."

"You meet her on the Avenue when the clubmen flit to and fro, and on Broadway when the merchants are returning from business. She is always looking for attention."

"And will get plenty of it—such as it is. Did you call on me this morning to discuss literature and Arabella Minton?"

"How snappy you are, Amber? I called to have a chat with you. Have you heard that Anne Not-

ting is to be married this spring. The affair was all made up at my entertainments."

"How proud you ought to be—I suppose. Who is the happy winner of Anne Notting?"

"General Basing."

"That old man!"

"He is only fifty, and so well preserved, and so very rich."

"Well, if Anne likes a man of fifty so well preserved and so very rich, it is none of our business."

"Anne likes nothing and no one very vehemently. General Basing is her ideal husband—pleasant to live with and not very unpleasant to lose; that is what she says."

"What would St. Paul say?"

"I do not suppose St. Paul has anything to do with it."

"Very likely not. You do look jaded by daylight, Bessie. You are working for the public too hard."

"I have so much to do."

"We have all enough to do—if we only do it—which we do not."

"General Basing took us all by surprise. He was always prating about the excellencies of the old-fashioned girls, and Anne is—well Anne is—rather rapid."

"The old-fashioned girls do to talk about. Just fancy the old-fashioned, modest, blushing, diffident damsels in our society! Men would have to respect their ignorance of evil, and what bores and dowdies they would consider them!"

"Men, now, like interesting women."

"Of course they do. I dare say that Adam and Eve were far more interesting company after eating

the forbidden fruit than they were before doing so. But what *have* you come to tell me, Bessie?"

"Something about St. Ange."

"I thought so," said Ambrosia.

"People are talking about you and St. Ange," commented Bessie.

"Is that any of your business?"

"Yes, it is. Jack says so too. He says you are my cousin, and he does not like you to be talked about."

"Jack is a prig."

"Amber, you shall not talk in that way of my husband."

"Do be quiet, Bessie! I am saying nothing derogatory to your husband. He is a glorious creature, of course."

"He really likes you, Amber. We only wanted to warn you."

"Robert is the person to warn. Go to Robert."

"We thought you—"

"Always the woman! Well, what is it?"

"Amber—I have the best of reasons for believing that St. Ange is—a—married—man! And that is not all."

"I am quite willing that St. Ange should be a married man. What possible difference can it make to me?"

"Miss Sadie Saltar made the discovery."

"Old maids usually do make such discoveries. I simply do not believe it."

"Come to my *musical* to-morrow night. It may be proved to your satisfaction. Miss Saltar knows all about it."

"Clever Miss Saltar!"

"She asked me to tell you—"

"No! Miss Saltar must come and tell her own tales. I will not hear them from you."

"She was shocked at what she found out."

"Very likely. She is one of those nasty people whose ears are more chaste than all the rest of their body. Let Miss Saltar come to me with her shocking tale. If she knows anything wrong of St. Ange it is her duty to tell either the doctor or myself."

"She feared she might hurt your feelings."

"About St. Ange?"

"Yes. Every one thinks you are—great friends."

"Every one is a fool. I dislike St. Ange. I always have hated him."

"I am so glad to hear you say that, dear Amber! So glad! It makes me happy! Is it not horrid weather? It really forces me to use unguarded expressions about it."

"Is it possible you can be so imprudent, Bessie? The weather might hear of it."

"Our new curate thinks that to rail at the weather is a kind of railing at Providence."

"What an absurdity! How can any one suppose that an eternal, everlasting God can be busy in arranging mud and rain and fog for us?"

"If you put it that way, it is not likely. I must hurry away now—"

"Having delivered your burden—'the word that was in you,' as Carlyle says."

Then, with a beautiful kiss-and-be-friends manner, Bessie embraced her cousin. They walked to the door together, hand in hand, and Bessie's final "word" was:

"I am sure you will be astonished at what Miss

Saltar has to tell you ; but whatever is the result, we must remember that the wretch deserves his fate."

"Possibly," laughed Amber ; "and yet, as the old song says—

‘ Parker—he was hanged for mutiny ;
Worse nor he was left behind.’

We may send St. Ange to Coventry or Halifax or New Orleans, but I have no doubt ‘worse nor he’ will be left behind."

"I will tell Miss Saltar you want to see her. Do not forget my *musicale* to-morrow night."

"I shall remember it."

She watched Bessie's carriage out of sight and then went back to her book or her meditations. She had no idea what sin St. Ange was guilty of ; but whether he had committed robbery or forgery or murder or matrimony, she was not sorry that he was going to be found out, and she mused upon the circumstance with that good inner laugh which scarcely ripples the face but leaves, nevertheless, a pleasant glow at the heart :

"Bessie will be so sweetly cruel ! Bessie will be so beautifully shocked ! I would not miss the *denouement*—no, not for a new Worth dinner-dress."

The novel Bessie had thought so objectionable was no longer necessary to Ambrosia. She found entertainment in her own thoughts. Then there was the anticipated visit to prepare for, Ambrosia having a very active sense of the toilets dashing to her own sex. But it was quite late in the afternoon when Miss Saltar arrived, and Ambrosia was tired of expectation ; she had a feeling of *ennui* and worn-out interest, and there was nothing in her visitor to create a fresh curiosity.

Miss Adelaide Saltar was one of the weary women of the nineteenth century. No other age could have produced her. She had begun life at fifteen, and she was now forty. She had been everywhere and seen everything and done everything and read everything, and found all vanity. As a last stimulant to human feeling, she had taken to mission work ; and perhaps come nearer to her own kind by touching it in its forlorn misery than she had done by travelling from India to Peru. She was called "queer," and she was queer ; for her life, though rich in experiences, had been set to no definite purpose, and was, therefore, without aim and without harmony. She had very little acquaintance with Ambrosia, and she had no particular desire to increase what she had. But Bessie had made her feel that Ambrosia doubted her story ; and the doubt had stimulated her desire to assert her truthfulness, though she had no good feeling toward Ambrosia for requiring this act from her.

She entered at once upon the subject, putting brusquely aside Ambrosia's attempts at social platitudes.

"I called," she said, "at the request of Mrs. Madison. She assures me she found it impossible to make you believe anything wrong of Doctor St. Ange."

"Is that the way Bessie put the matter ? She is mistaken. I preferred to hear the story from you, without Mrs. Madison's commentaries on it. That is all."

"What did she tell you ?"

"She said only that Doctor St. Ange is a married man. Is that any sin ?"

"Not primarily; but if a married man enters families as an unmarried man and conducts himself as such with young girls, what then?"

"He would be a villain, of course. But what can you or I know of Doctor St. Ange's private life? It is a fact that some men marry and some men do not marry, but do worse; and some men marry and do worse, too; but they never tell the truth about such things, if they do not wish to tell it. I am almost certain that Doctor St. Ange told Doctor Carter he was an unmarried man. But it really makes no difference to Doctor Carter, and still less to myself."

"But, Mrs. Carter, you are accountable for his intrusion into good society. He meets daily many estimable young ladies."

"I am not accountable for the estimable young ladies. If they cannot take care of themselves, they have parents or guardians. I could name a dozen young men about whose private life no one knows anything. They also *may* be married."

"Until we know they are guilty—"

"Guilty of marriage?"

"Put it so if you like. I am innocent. Until we know that they are guilty of being married men masquerading as lovers of young girls and married women, we may suppose them innocent."

"How do you know that Doctor St. Ange is a married man?"

"I will give you my reasons, and then I have done my duty. You can do yours or not, as you prefer. Mrs. Jack Madison thinks the reasons good and sufficient ones."

"And Mrs. Jack Madison will do her duty and every other person's duty also, I have no doubt."



Miss Saltar waved her hand and said, with an air of studied weariness :

“There is a little girl in whom I take an interest. She is very poor, and she is sick with consumption. Once or twice a week I go to see her. Last Thursday she sent me word they had moved to a house in Second Street, and to this house I went. As I sat talking to her, a child in the next room cried. She seemed fretted by the crying, and finally said she must rise to go for the child. She had promised the mother to do so. I went in her place. As I lifted the squalling little morsel, I saw on the chimney-piece a large photo of Doctor St. Ange. I lifted it also, and on the back was written :

“‘To my dear Leanore, from her devoted husband, Achille St. Ange.’

Is that a satisfactory proof of his marriage?”

“I think it is a suspicious circumstance tending that way.”

“I asked the girl who lived in the room. She answered a doctor and his family. She said also the father was employed by a famous physician, who paid him a mere pittance and stole all his ideas. Further, that he seldom got time to see his family and that his wife was obliged to dress ladies’ hair in the day and also to go to entertainments at night and sing Spanish songs to her mandolin. I asked if the couple were happy, and was told they had fierce quarrels and that the elegant Doctor St. Ange frequently struck his wife with those long, white hands he is so fond of displaying—also, that he is cruel to the children.”

“Did you see the mother?”

"She had gone to Mrs. Van Tassel's to dress hair, my little *protégée* thought; she went there every day. The eldest two children were playing in a silent way with some pictured blocks, on the floor of an inner room. I know well that many people will say: 'It just took an old maid to find out such a scandal.' I did not find it out; it found me out, as you must acknowledge. I have told you the truth; you can do as you like in the affair. It is off my mind, and I am glad; for a duty on my mind is a great burden."

"I should think that little girl dying of consumption would be a duty on your mind."

"It is; but I do all I can for her."

"I think not. If I were you, I should send her to a warm climate and give her a chance for her life. You are rich. Her life is perhaps in your hands. You have been telling me my duty. I am only reciprocating."

"Are you trying to be unpleasant, dear Mrs. Carter? It is not worth while as far as I am concerned."

"No. But duty is always unpleasant, I think."

"So many things in life are unpleasant! Suppose you forget that I was the bringer of evil news. Really, I did not want to annoy you. I simply thought you ought to know."

"Of course, Doctor Carter ought to know—if he does not know already, which I think likely. What disagreeable weather we are having! I heard you were going to Point Comfort. How nice it would be to take that little sick girl with you!"

Then Ambrosia was alone with the news she had received. She stood by the fire, making a picture in

her mind of the shabby rooms, the lonely children playing silently in them, the fretful baby, the mother dressing hair and playing the mandolin, and the father dawdling about fashionable drawing-rooms, making eyes and whispering sweet speeches to unsuspecting girls.

"Yes," she said, in a passionate whisper—"yes, even daring to press my hand! He did, last night! I wonder I did not strike him with the same hand!"

Her face was aflame with anger, and her foot was tapping the fender to the rapid beat of her heart.

Robert found her in this attitude, but she turned her face to him with a radiant smile.

"I am so glad you are come home!" she said. "I have heard some news. Bessie sent Miss Saltar here to tell me St. Ange is a married man."

"She is mistaken. He told me he was unmarried. Bessie and Miss Saltar! I would not care much about anything they arranged."

"'Arranged?'"

"What have we to do with St. Ange's private life? What have we to do with any one's private life? I do not believe a word you have heard, my dear."

"Bessie said something about 'proving it' at her *musical* to-night. Will you go with me?"

"If Bessie is bent upon offering us sensation, I am not taking any, thank you. I do not like St. Ange; but I would not care to see any man under Bessie's inquisition. I will come for you near twelve o'clock. I suppose Will and Louisa will be there?"

"Will is to play a certain *bravura*, and Louisa sings it. Now, will you go with me?"

"No. I dislike amateur singing and playing. And you will have had enough before midnight."

The first person Ambrosia saw in Bessie's drawing-room was St. Ange. He was, indeed, remarkably in evidence that night, and Bessie seemed to encourage all his darings and pretensions. The evening went pleasantly away, and about eleven o'clock the rooms were crowded. Then Mrs. Jack Madison announced "Madame Leanore," and the lady stepped from behind a curtain with her mandolin in her hand. Ambrosia and Miss Saltar were looking steadily at St. Ange. He was fastening in his coat a flower which a pretty girl had just given him. When the flower was safe, he looked up, and the next moment, with a face of crimson to the roots of his hair, he was hurrying through the press toward the door. Bessie intercepted him—Bessie, with Ambrosia at her side.

"Oh, doctor!" cried Mrs. Jack Madison. "Doctor, you *must*, you *really must* come to help Madame Leanore! You are the only person present who can sing Spanish!"

"I cannot sing to-night, madam. It is impossible!"

"Can I not persuade you? Then madame must entreat for herself. Shall I call madame? You surely cannot refuse her? It would be impossible! Is she not lovely? That is, she would be if dressed becomingly. Poor soul! I hear she has a sad story. Oh, you wicked men! You are so bad!"

All the time thus talking, she was gradually leading St. Ange toward his wife. With her usual charming frankness, she had put her hand through his arm, and without absolute rudeness he could not free himself. His mind took in the position with the rapidity of lightning, and he resolved to face boldly what it was impossible for him to escape.



But the hum of conversation beat like a hundred drums on his ear, and the handsome, splendidly dressed crowd pressed around him like an implacable fate. As he drew near to Leanore, their eyes met, and hers received such an instant and imperative command that she was able to break in two the cry that sprang from her lips. Bessie busied herself about the copy of the song. Ambrosia kept her bright eyes fixed upon the traitorous husband. He spoke in a whisper to Leanore, and she paled as if death had spoken to her. Then he struck a few notes, and several besides Leanore saw the devil in his eyes. The poor woman sang the first verse with a marvelous power and sweetness, then she threw upward her hands, her voice faltered, it sobbed, she sat down, she would have fallen forward if Ambrosia had not supported her.

Bessie uttered a sympathetic little cry, and several ladies ejaculated: "She is fainting!" There was a sudden hush and lull, and Mr. Madison and Jack assisted her from the room. As they did so, St. Ange rose, and Ambrosia's eyes, blazing with scorn, met his.

"Why do you not go to your wife?" she asked.

It was a hard question, and she paid the price of her indiscretion, for he answered promptly, in a voice meant to be heard:

"*Dearest*, I will explain all this to you later." Then, in a whisper: "It is your doing, and you shall pay for it!"

Several heard the word "*dearest*" applied to her, and many more saw the whisper. Ambrosia was confounded, indignant, dazed with angry amazement, but what explanation could she make? Her

first thought was Bessie. She found her in the cloak-room with Leanore.

"What outrage is this thing you have done, Bessie Madison?" she asked. "It is simply infamous!"

"That is what I say!" cried the poor wife, rising to her feet and conquering herself by the force of her passion. "It is an infamy to make of my sorrows a sensation for herself. Lady, if you have here a carriage, send me to my home. I must go very quick. My poor Achille, in his temper, will know not the little children. They will suffer. For the Holy Mother's sake, send me to them!"

Ambrosia turned to Jack.

"Get my carriage—get my carriage for this lady at once. She has been cruelly treated."

As she spoke, Clara came hastily into the room, and Ambrosia told her the whole circumstance, not even hesitating over St. Ange's false accusation of herself. Bessie would take no blame on the latter count. She said she did not suppose there was any cause to conciliate St. Ange, and that, if Amber knew of any, she ought not to have run the risk of unpleasant truths; but she must go to her company; she had no time for people with private stories.

"You must take Amber with you," said Clara, positively. "Whatever position you have been the cause of putting Amber in, you must share it. I insist upon it, Bessie."

"Amber can come, if she likes."

"Amber, dear, you must go with Bessie," pleaded Clara. "You cannot notice St. Ange's words. Every one knows they were the outcome of venomous spite. Go, dear! I will send Will to you."



Will had taken the vacated piano, and Louisa was singing. Amber went to Miss Saltar's side. Bessie had an air of injured innocence, and many people pitied her for the annoyance her cousin, Mrs. Carter, had caused her.

"Such a sensitive little thing!" they whispered. "So particularly proper! How it has wounded her! And yet how gently she speaks to her cousin! Is she not lovely?"

Very soon Will was at liberty, and Amber told both him and Louisa the shameful wrong St. Ange had done her. Louisa sympathized, and yet Ambrosia could feel a shadow of drawback in her sympathy. Will took her on his arm, walked through the parlors with her and remained by her side. But Ambrosia could see the questioning, uneasy look with which Louisa followed Will and herself. Oh, how she longed for her own husband! And when she saw Robert smiling at her from the door, she could scarcely restrain the cry of joy which sprang from her heart.

Once with him in the carriage, she laid her head upon his breast and wept with an anguish Robert felt was this time only too genuine. He did not question her until they were at home. Then she told him all; and Robert listened gravely, silently, with that inward passion, which reveals itself without words. He did not reproach Ambrosia. He felt that her imprudence had been punished cruelly enough. He believed her fully, when she declared she had done nothing, said nothing, looked nothing, to merit such words. He had only a passing thought of the many women in the room who had done, said and looked, and who had yet escaped all condemna-

tion ; and the injustice of circumstances made him sigh.

As for St. Ange, he felt for him a contempt which scarcely required hatred to increase it. He talked the night away with Ambrosia, soothing her, reasoning with her, advising her. But he longed for the morning. He wanted to kick the wretch out of his life. He was angry at Will for bringing him into it ; angry at himself for enduring the man so long. How many quarrels he had caused ! How much suffering and heartache had had their rise in his hateful presence ! He felt his own wrongs bitterly also ; for he had really been generous to the creature, and yet he was accused of giving him only a pittance—and of *stealing his ideas* ! Miss Saltar had said the words to Ambrosia, and she would not hesitate to say them to others.

All night he kept a sorrowful session with Ambrosia, and when at length she fell asleep with exhaustion, he was more alive than ever he remembered being before. Sleep was his last thought and last necessity. He was in a fever of insulted manhood. He radiated anger from every point. His eyes were on fire, his hands twitching. His controlled passion dominated every other desire. He wanted no food, no papers or letters. He wanted nothing but the hour which would bring the measureless villain to his presence.

St. Ange entered the office insolently and ready for the fray. Robert said only :

“The time has come for us to part. There is the money I owe you.”

“It is far too little. You have always underpaid me, and you have stolen my ideas quite long enough.”

The wickedness of the two charges almost strangled Robert, though he was somewhat prepared for them. But he did not design to answer them. He turned to his desk and began to write. St. Ange had now his opportunity, and whatever his wicked heart could devise, his wicked tongue uttered. And Robert felt that he could have nothing to say to such abuse; could not enter into controversy with so vile a foe about the honor of his wife and the integrity of himself. Under the circumstances, defense would have been excuse; and excuse would have been self-accusation. But his position was a moral pillory, in which he took lash after lash with apparent indifference; because he knew right well that retaliation would be unspeakable degradation.

But oh, how he suffered! The almost miraculous strain under which he took his punishment was a year's aging, and all the time his body winced and trembled, his conscience reminded him that it was "his own fault." Even after his tormentor had gone away, he sat for two hours thinking—and thinking, without definite idea either about the past or the future. He appeared to be writing, but he did not make a letter. In a troubled, turbid way he was feeling all the wicked and cruel positions St. Ange could put Ambrosia and himself into—feeling savagely his own blindness and indifference—trying to calculate the advantages he had permitted this stranger to take not only in his domestic concerns but in his business. He knew that both alike were at the mercy of a scoundrel's scornful word and smile.

For some hours he endured such self-reproach and remorse as spirits who have outlived their

opportunities may feel; and in the whole affair he could find for himself no comfort but the fact that he had at least preserved his self-respect and kept his temper under an outrageous temptation to degrade his repentance by words or acts which would bring him down to the level of his foe.

"I answered him never a word, Amber," he said, when his wife questioned him. "That is a little comfort to me; but, oh, I could take a year to curse him and then not be satisfied."



CHAPTER XIX.

"CLEAR SHINING AFTER RAIN."

And love, our light at night and shade at noon,
Lulls us to rest with songs and turns away
All shafts of shelterless, tumultuous day.—*Rossetti.*

The time of smiles came round once more.—*Wells.*

During the first day of acute humiliation Ambrosia had received a little comfort from the practical sympathy of Clara. She called very early in the morning and offered to come at once to Doctor Carter's house. But Ambrosia felt that this would be a false step.

"I have done nothing, Clara," she said, "that calls for the support of your presence. If you made this change, every one would say I anticipated neglect or scorn. I am sure it is best for Robert and myself to be sufficient for each other."

"Then I shall go to Mayberry. Bessie has been too absolute for some time. I will not any longer appear to sanction the crude cruelties and insolence of her youth and inexperience. When she is older, she will likely be sweeter; now she has all the acrid offenses of her years."

"Are the young necessarily cruel?"

"There are beautiful exceptions to the general rule; yet, young girls are generally without pity. There is no question about it. Their want of experience makes them hard to sorrows they cannot understand. They say the most scornful things to their friends; they even hurt and humiliate their own mothers. They are assertive and aggressive, because their instinctive selfishness prompts them to taking all and giving nothing. A young girl is a cruel creature, Ambrosia, but a young matron is frequently much worse. Bessie's conduct last night was a piece of brutality, and I have told her so. What right had she and Miss Saltar to put St. Ange in such a position? It was an interference with Doctor Carter's household and business that was unwarrantable. I do not say that she contemplated St. Ange's insult to you; she thought of nothing but the little ripple of interest it would give to her party. People who talked of it would naturally talk of her. That was as far as her reasoning went. How much St. Ange's wife would suffer at the time from shock or afterward from anger, she declined to take into consideration. And yet, had any one so interfered in her affairs, she would have babbled about it as an inconceivable outrage."

"I am sure Uncle Madison was angry at her last night."

"He is very angry, indeed. Jack, poor fellow, thinks and speaks as directed. Come to Mayberry with me, for a few days."

"No, dear. I will not run away from a mouthful of bad words. Words will not slay me. And Robert has been so kind and just in the matter. Perhaps this very trouble may draw us close together again."

If so, I will thank God for it. At any rate, I will take what opportunities it offers."

"That is right. Bessie and Jack, Will and Louisa are talking of Europe this summer. They will make a party of their own. Bessie may find some changes when she comes back. She had been so tyrannical in her home, that her father is beginning to rebel against her."

"Clara, you do not believe anything wrong of me, do you?"

"I believe in your innocence to the uttermost. I am sorry that for any cause you showed St. Ange more attention lately. I must tell you that some accuse you of flirting with him."

"Who of our set has not flirted with him? And if I did so, it was for the purpose of quickening Robert's love."

"Well, my dear, a bad road never leads to a good place; and in flirting, you cannot go on with what you never begin. There ought to be no suspicion about a wife's conduct."

"You are so old-fashioned, Clara."

"My dear, purity and honor are never old-fashioned. When they are so, good men and women may break their hearts and go out of the world."

Louisa and Will followed Clara; and Will's anger at Bessie and Louisa's womanly criticisms of her conduct were a little consolation.

"Bessie has such a high opinion of herself," said Louisa, "and the world has caught this opinion from her. But I wish she had fewer virtues and more amiability. I will tell you something about Bessie. After her last ball, I found her writing a description of it for the *Home Journal*, and she had

incidentally remarked that she 'looked lovely.' Think of such courage!"

Ambrosia smiled; and Will put his thumb in his vest and strutted out with an affectation of weariness:

"Oh, for an age so sheltered from annoy
That I may never know how change the moons
Or hear the voice of women's defamation!"

It struck Ambrosia, however, that Will and Louisa treated the affair with too little interest. Yet it was a difficult visit to pay, and very likely they felt relieved when it was over. Then the day went wearily on until Robert's return home. And he was silent with wrath and not inclined to talk before dinner had lubricated his feelings. Then it was different. He told Ambrosia all he had longed to say to St. Ange, and found solid comfort in this explanation of himself. Still there was an unhappy, restless atmosphere in the house and a weight on each bosom that sympathy did not lighten.

On the third morning the premonitory unhappiness was explained. The doctor found in his morning paper a letter from St. Ange, claiming the discoveries already linked with Doctor Carter's name, and boldly accusing the doctor of taking advantage of his poverty to appropriate experiments he was himself incapable of making. For this end, he averred, he had been poorly paid and kept in poverty; every advantage having been taken of his being a stranger without friends and without knowledge of the peculiarities of Northern life and practice.

It was a cruel accusation, and so cleverly based on its foundation of truth that Robert saw at once how

difficult it would be to answer it. Besides, the world has no time to make judgments. It takes assertions and believes them until more plausible assertions are made. And it was a truth that he had dismissed St. Ange just when their long experiments were being brought to a successful close. For it is a general fact that an unfortunate thing is almost always forced to be done at an unfortunate time. It had been so in this case. But how could he explain circumstances resting upon an insult offered to his wife? Or how bring forward the part which Bessie Madison and Adelaide Saltar had played in the wretched *denouement*?

He wrote answer after answer, and each one seemed tamer and more improbable than the other. He had really intended to give St. Ange all the credit he deserved. But who would not believe this? It was easy to authenticate his generosity to the man in money matters. But how many would take the trouble to satisfy themselves of the fact? He was actually in a position where even Truth might shrink from explanations and find it almost impossible to clear herself. And then came the interviewers, and all alike perceived that Doctor Carter did not tell the whole truth. Besides which, he lacked the suavity of St. Ange—the familiarities, the plausible affectations of wounded confidence, the scarcely restrained tears over his late employer's faithlessness.

Ambrosia did not appear in these interviews with the press magnates; but St. Ange's wife seconded ably her husband's accusations. She had no compunctions or reservations about a class of women from whom she had received nothing but insulting condescensions. She did not hesitate to blame Mrs.

Carter, to insinuate, nay, to assert those imputations which sprang naturally from St. Ange's wounded vanity and wicked heart. For at that time St. Ange was playing the devoted husband and father, and Leanore would have cheerfully sworn to anything he chose to assert.

So it mattered little that Doctor Carter crippled his own defense rather than to allude to his wife. His very reticence was a kind of confirmation of Madame St. Ange's assertions, and thus a guarded but still sufficiently clear association of Ambrosia in the quarrel was consequent. "A woman in it, of course," said the readers; "there is always a woman somewhere!" And then they recalled Doctor Carter's beautiful wife; how much younger she was than her husband, how gay and fashionable and how intimate the fascinating young St. Ange had been with the family. Every one had his own verdict, based upon his individual likes or dislikes, and there really appeared to be no use in resisting this tide of opinions.

For a little time Ambrosia let it beat her on every side. She refused to keep the shelter of her home; she would not permit the slightest unusual public attention from her husband. She told Robert it would be a few days' talk only; that as soon as the newspapers let the affair alone, every one else would do the same. In some respects she was right. A few days' discussion of St. Ange's wrongs made them a phantom, a thing of pestilent vapor to the press, and the makers of news blew it out of their road and passed on to newer events. But society, that is born of men and women full of suspicions and supersensitive respectability, was more implac-



able. Without absolutely cutting Ambrosia, it made her feel that she was something of an intrusion. It had its Easter festivities to contemplate, and could not have its tranquil sense of propriety invaded by people who had even been touched by a doubtful assertion.

Every day Ambrosia received some reminder that she had been accused. Her guilt or innocence made no difference; she had no business to be accused. Other sinners were more careful of their ways. No one really believed anything wrong of Mrs. Carter, but nearly every one had some personal slight or dislike to pay off. And how perfectly women pay such debts when they get their opportunity! Satan himself must look on with admiration. In such circumstances, it is almost impossible for lukewarm friends or mere acquaintances to avoid giving their contribution to the clearing-off. They may make faint suggestions of probable mistakes or faint reminders of the culprit's known good qualities, but all demurrers of this kind are smiled away into contemptuous oblivion. So at this time Ambrosia had few friends; for if it be an almost impossible task to argue for a dog assailed by slander, how much more impossible to defend a woman in the same calamity!

Doctor Carter had his own full share of the public disapproval. The controversy, pushed out of the daily press, was renewed by St. Ange in the medical papers, and thus every week brought a fresh accusation and demanded a fresh rebuttal. He could not rid himself of the incubus. In addition, there was a more than wordy attack upon him professionally. St. Ange had secured the sympathy of some of Doc-

tor Carter's patients, and had begun business on the promise of their support. His office was not far from Doctor Carter's office, and though he cared little for the financial loss, the name in the window made his eyes flash and his heart burn whenever he passed it.

And a professional fraternity has all the smallnesses of a feminine set. The members of it made cutting jokes and said ill-natured things in a smiling way, and the familiarity of the offenders took away none of the intended sting. In their essence they were just as cruel as the vacant stares and polite cuts, the courteous chilliness or scornful recognitions of Ambrosia's friends and acquaintances.

Week after week St. Ange appeared to be steadily wasting away Doctor Carter's reputation and business. For it is one of the most obvious characteristics of evil that at first it has the semblance of success. David fretted over "the man who brought wicked devices to pass" centuries ago; and in most lives of to-day there is a time when the wronged open the blessed book at the thirty-seventh psalm, and let their tears downfall on its earlier verses, and lift up their souls with gladness and confidence on its closing promises. Robert had not found out this old consolation. He had only Ambrosia, and sometimes she failed.

One morning Ambrosia went to bid Will and Louisa good-bye. They were going to England; and, after all, Bessie and Jack were going with them. Louisa said she hated not to be friends with her relatives. Bessie had said she was "so sorry," and it was not right to be unforgiving. Besides, if they went to Ambleside and Grasmere without Bessie, it would not be at all like old times. Louisa had said

these things frequently to Will, and she had also added, with a sigh :

"Amber is just a little imprudent, Will, and I do think the lesson will be good for her. Married people ought to be sufficient for each other. *We are, Will!*"

And how could Will resist such reasonable arguments ?

So Will took his tone from Louisa ; and when Ambrosia called, she felt this. At the bottom of his heart Louisa had put that faint disapproval, and it chilled all they said. Ambrosia could not tell how they hurt her, how they disappointed her, how it was she was made to feel like a chidden child on probation. They were both affectionate in manner. Why did she resent the manner ? They both gave her the kindest hopes in the most unexceptionable words. Why, then, did she feel like flinging the words back from her ? She left their presence with a sense of injury and indignation, and her heart swelled, and she felt as if it would break.

As her carriage passed down a street near her old home, a little church set back in a corner struck her with a feeling of familiarity, and a strong desire arose in her to enter it. There was no reason to deny the wish, and she alighted and passed within the open door. The place was quite empty, but she remembered it. There hung the white image of the Crucified One, at whose feet she had fallen when she was wearied and terrified with the eternities and veracities of the philosophers, and longing for a Heart to pity her failings and love her in spite of them.

She had been a girl then ; she was a woman now —a woman wearing a crown of thorns, that every

friend pressed tighter on her brow. She went swiftly toward the pitiful, downcast face. She sank before it on her knees, like one who suddenly meets the Cross in a wilderness. She wept and prayed and "poured out all her complaint," and arose at last, justified and comforted.

Then she perceived that a priest was standing silently before the altar. She felt that he had been praying with her and for her. As she moved, he came toward her. She lifted her eyes to his eyes, and he saw the light of comfort in them; and he said gently: "Go in peace, my daughter." Then she bowed her head and went out with the blessing.

It was the day on which the *Medical Journal* came, and she had feared another attack upon her husband and all the miserable heart-burnings and defenses to follow. She no longer feared it. She had a conviction that there was a turn in the sorrowful tide. Those who *pray really*, however seldom, know and are sure that the very gift of prayer includes the gift prayed for. Even the sense of loss and trouble she had brought away from her interview with Will and Louisa had fallen from her. She went home cheerfully, and Robert met her with a look of satisfaction. He had the *Journal* in one hand, and he struck it lightly with the other as he said:

"Amber, my love! They have refused to publish anything further from St. Ange. The editor very properly says: 'The future work of Doctor Carter will prove or disprove the allegations his late assistant has made.' That is enough. *The future work!* Amber, why did we not think of that before? I am content now. My claims can stand well upon this

foundation. I fear St. Ange no more. But, oh, my dear, what a sorrowful life I have led you lately!"

She did not speak, but she crept closer to him and slipped her hand into his. And some womanly instinct told her not to make light of his confession. He *had* led her a sorrowful life. It was good and right he should confess it. It was good that he should feel how unkind and unfair he had been regarding the girl Meta—good that he should feel he had been careless of her happiness, in his determination to subordinate his household to the personal conveniences of his business. He had often called Ambrosia "selfish" and felt himself a little of a martyr to her selfishness; but he saw clearly now that no experiments were a sufficient excuse for subjecting his wife to the society of a man whom her instincts, from the first, had pronounced "dangerous." He had not been careful of her good name, and his own had suffered. The retribution was a righteous one, and he acknowledged it with a manly and honest regret.

Ambrosia was no less generous. Their explanations and concessions were really a new kind of courtship. Each strove to excuse the other. Each desired to make confession easy and forgiveness sweet. And as they talked, Robert had a thought which sealed the renewal of their vows.

"Let us go," he said, "to the mountains, to the Catskills, and try to learn each other better. After all this worry, I feel as if the woods and the wilderness will be salvation. By the 1st of June you can have the house ready to leave, and I will arrange my affairs. Then for three months we will think

only of each other and of the future. We will put all of the past, that is unhappy, behind our backs."

"Dear, that will be lovely!"

"You have long wanted to learn how to ride. I will get you a safe pony and teach you. Then we can ride together."

"Oh, Robert! How happy that will make me! Bessie is forever talking about her horsemanship. When she rides with Jack in the Park, she believes every person is there only to watch them."

"We will divide observation with her when Jack and she return. You shall also learn how to drive."

"Dear, you will make me the happiest woman in the world."

"I will write to-day and secure a cottage and then put my business in such shape that I need not come into New York during all our holiday."

"And I will get the house in summer order and look after some dresses. I shall want some pretty dresses, Robert."

"To be sure you will get all the pretty dresses you desire."

This plan, simple as it was, required a good deal of discussion, and in its consideration, all the hard feelings of the past were buried. They felt toward each other all the loving kindness of their first espousals, and they were wise enough to give semblance and words to the feeling. So great is the power of goodness. As the most beautiful tints and colors are procured from the tar which defileth all it touches, so now the goodness of honest regret and confession brought out of the vile droppings of slander and false accusation the sweetness of mutual



confidence, the tenderness of renewed and chastened affection.

The next day, Ambrosia had a visit from Clara. She was looking so lovely in a violet dress and white bonnet that Ambrosia was compelled to say :

"How pretty you are, Clara! No wonder Bessie thought you too young for the position you had taken."

"So you also have heard of that remark? It was not a kind one. Did Bessie call on you before she went to Europe?"

"No."

"I told her she ought to apologize for her interference with your affairs."

"She has not done so."

"No. She thought you owed her an apology. If you had not told St. Ange to go to his wife, she says there would have been no public exposure. *She* meant only to have whispered the fact to St. Ange, just to make him more prudent, she says; and Miss Saltar was to have let the matter sift quietly through our set by telling one person at a time. Then all would have been warned, and no one would have had to take the onus of giving a definite publicity to the scandal. She supposed then that St. Ange would have disappeared, and so you would also have been delivered from temptation. That was her plan; but, as it was, she says your disappointment and impetuous temper have been the source of great annoyance, having almost made a scene in her house and really put the disagreeable discovery on her. So she thinks herself to have been much injured."

"Did she expect to play with fire and not get burned?"

"Yes. She expected it only to burn others."

"She went to Europe without giving her last entertainment?"

"She made poor health the excuse, but really, Mr. Madison was so angry he would not permit the proposed ball."

"Has Uncle Madison so much spirit left? I thought Bessie ruled him with autocratic power."

"She has taken such cruel advantage of his love and goodness to her and Jack that she cannot blame him if in the future he attends a little to his own happiness."

"I think he ought to do so. He is a very handsome man, and good as he is rich. Will he marry before Bessie comes home?"

"In ten days."

"Ten days! Who is the fortunate woman?"

"I am the fortunate woman, Amber."

"Clara! Clara! I am so glad! I am sure you will be happy."

"I am sure of that also. Mr. Madison has been my friend for many years. He and Robert stood by me in all the sorrow preceding your father's death. I know the heart I am trusting. I am confident of the love that is mine. But there was no thought of marriage between us until Bessie treated him with so much neglect and unkindness. She forgot that all came from his hand, and scarcely permitted him an opinion in his own house. We shall alter that."

"I have frequently noticed lately how little respect she gave him. It was not right."

"It was unjust. And, above all qualities, justice is the grandest. Let love go, but let us have justice. Mr. Madison is at the head of a great business. He ought to be the head of his own house. When I am his wife, I intend to see him in that place."

"Bessie will never consent."

"Bessie is not bad. Put Bessie in the right position, and she will be very good. For we may say what we like, Amber, it is not so much changing ourselves as changing our circumstances which makes us better."

"I think Bessie ought to have her own house."

"I think it would be much better. A girl of twenty ruling her father's house is unnatural. Bessie has absolutely begun to feel as if he ought to give her the last favor and slip into his grave, and let Jack and her enjoy his wealth without the encumbrance of his presence."

"I wonder men make more money than will suffice for their own life and love."

"So do I. Look at the Jamfrys. Stephen Jamfry's two daughters married men whom he rightly detested—senseless, selfish creatures, who were perpetually wishing 'the old hunks' dead and buried. His only son married a singer, who dyed her hair and painted her cheeks and was ten years older than her husband. The money made with such sweat of brain and forfeiture of all the joys of life is now being squandered by strangers to his house and name, who scoff at his memory and quarrel over the money, for whose acquisition he cut short his life. Mr. Madison shall not follow his example, if I can help it."

"What kind of a wedding will you have, Clara?"

"A very quiet one ; but I want you and Robert to be present. Mr. Madison will also bring two friends. We shall have no bridesmaids, no flowers, no music, no company to our wedding-breakfast—nothing but the ceremony and the signing of the register."

"But for all the lack, it will be a happy wedding, and Robert and I will be proud to be in the little company. Where are you going afterward?"

"We are going *home*. We shall eat our wedding-breakfast in the usual parlor, and just one hour later than the usual time. Mr. Madison cannot leave the city, as Jack is away ; and I do not know of any nicer place to spend our honeymoon than in that large, comfortable house, with all the luxuries of New York at our hand. If we want change, we can run down to the Branch for a few days."

"You are a sensible woman, Clara."

Then they talked over the Catskill proposition, and Clara was delighted with it ; and so interested were they with the asides of these two great questions, that both forgot the time, and Robert was home to dinner while they were yet in the midst of Clara's wedding garments. Then Clara decided to stay all night with Ambrosia, and the conversation never flagged until bed-time ; and Robert could not help the reflection that, after all, our own personal interests, our joys and sorrows and hopes and failures are the most interesting of all topics. We may talk from newspapers and books, talk of science or society, politics or theology ; but when we talk from



our hearts we talk of ourselves, our own family and our own likes, dislikes and interests.

"Clara's marriage took place at the time appointed and in the quietly pleasant manner she desired. And very soon after it, Ambrosia and Robert went to the mountains. They were both glad to shake the memory of the city from their hearts. Even to the very last day they did not escape some echo from the scandal, some heartache from the injustice of their positions. It is one thing to resolve to throw an annoyance behind recognition; it is another to compel the annoyance to take the place that has been assigned to it. One day the situation seemed to be gained; then a trifle happened which revived all the passionate indignation of the first wound. The doctor met St. Ange, or he heard of the defection of a patient, or he had to endure an invidious remark or a joking remark made in an invidious spirit, from some envious rival. Or Ambrosia was cut by some one she had once patronized, or she had an impertinent caller or was wounded in some other of the thousand indefinite ways known to contemptible women.

But mutual wrongs often bring forth mutual love, and the sympathetic discussion of these outside grievances prevented absolutely the old domestic offenses. So that their very worst enemies did more for them than their best friends could have done, and the event which might have killed confidence restored it to more than its first sweet strength.

And there is nothing for hearts weary of the struggle of life like fresh air and the smell of the

woods. Robert found out that below his preference for city life there was the liking that all men have—latent or developed—for their Mother Nature. He let her peace sink into his heart and found Ambrosia sufficient. He was well acquainted with horses, and he taught her how to ride. She was an apt scholar, she looked exceedingly handsome during her riding exercises; and Robert did not disdain that small pleasure which comes to a man through other men envying him.

He taught Ambrosia how to drive also, and when August came there was shooting enough to make it an excuse for long days in the mountains. He had not carried a gun for many years, and he was very much delighted to find that neither his hand nor his eye had forgot its cunning. And above all things, he valued Ambrosia's admiration of him in shooting-costume and her naive compliment about the easy way in which he carried his gun.

"Why, it looks like a limb of your body, Robert!" she said, proudly, and Robert thought the saying good enough to repeat, perhaps a little too often. Besides these things,

"The married lovers went a-nutting in the woods;
They clomb the hill; they wandered in the glades;
They dangled in the wherries, on the sparkling stream."

And Clara wrote often and told them what the great world was doing and what Bessie and Jack were doing in the great world. And Clara was one of those charming correspondents who never tell unpleasant things but always find out the very news that will give a sweet taste to life. And so it hap-

pened that at the end of August she had the pleasure of writing thus :

"I passed down — Street yesterday and saw that St. Ange's name had been removed from the window. So I made some inquiries. Robert and Ambrosia, the man has disappeared like a stone dropped into mid-ocean. He has left nothing behind him but debts and an evil name. When you return, the world, with all its favor and its fawning, will be at your feet again."

And Robert did not affect any false sympathy for the wretch. He said frankly :

"I am glad he is gone! The sight of his name offended me. If I met him, I had a headache for days afterward. Now I will go back to my work. I feel as if Clara's letter was the 'call' to it. I will prove to the world now the right to the work which I have already done." The very thought filled him with longing and desire, and he said : "Dearest, let us go home at once."

And Ambrosia answered :

"We will go home to-morrow." And as she spoke, a boy gave her a little roll addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. Robert Carter," and Robert said :

"It is from Will! Dear Will! How glad he will be to see us so happy again!"

"Yes," said Amber, "even marriage could not very much spoil Will. Will always found time to think of others."

"And Louisa is worthy of him. They suit each other exactly."

"Louisa is like sweet milk—not exhilarating, but real nice."

They were removing the outer cover as they spoke, and when the roll was opened they found a strip of vellum, upon ivory and gold. And the

words written on it were in gold; and Robert and Ambrosia, with hands and cheeks touching, read together this golden story which Will had sent them:

"One knocked at the beloved's door, and a voice from within asked: '*Who is there?*' And he answered: '*It is I!*' Then the voice said: '*This house will not hold me and thee.*' And the door was not opened. Then went the lover into the desert and fasted and prayed in solitude. And after a year he returned and knocked again at the door. And again the voice asked: '*Who is there?*' And he said: '*It is thyself.*' And the door was opened to him." *

And when they had finished reading they looked at each other with shining eyes, and their lips met and their hearts understood the parable.

THE END.

* From Persian Parables.

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